



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Experiences and testimonies of two civilians who were forcibly recruited by the Burma Army (June 2026)

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District, in 2026. In 2024 and 2025, the Burma Army arbitrarily arrested and recruited two young men from Yangon and Tanintharyi divisions as soldiers. These two young men shared what they experienced and the human rights abuses that they had seen when they were forcibly recruited, as well as how they escaped from the Burma Army. Since the 2021 coup, the Burma Army has arbitrarily arrested and forcibly recruited many villagers in Karen State.¹

“They [the Burma Army] try to spread propaganda. Every day, they say good things about themselves to make us believe them. It is like brainwashing. They try to put false information into our brains. They use all kinds of methods to [make people] obey their orders. They threaten us that they will shoot us dead if anyone runs away. When I was attending military training, someone tried to run away. Finally, they were able to arrest him. Then, they asked all trainees to beat him. 200 trainees beat him up. After that, they detained him. It was very bad. We could not even recognize his face [as a result of the beating]. They made him an example so that other trainees would not dare to run away.”

- Maung² Q---, a former Tatmadaw³ soldier who escaped after being forcibly recruited

On 1 February 2021, the Burma Army forcibly seized national power [in a military coup] after accusing the National League for Democracy (NLD),⁴ which had won a landslide victory in the 2020 general election, of voting fraud. The people did not accept this action. As a result,

¹ The present document is based on information received in June 2026. 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. This document combines several received reports with the following KHRG internal log numbers: #26-163-D1, #26-163-A1-I1, and #26-163-A2-I1.

² ‘Maung’ is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person’s name.

³ The terms Burma military regime, Burma Army, junta, Tatmadaw, and SAC are used interchangeably throughout this report to describe Burma’s armed forces. Villagers themselves commonly use Burma Army, Burmese soldiers, or alternatively the name adopted by the Burma military regime at the time –from the 2021 coup to July 2025, the State Administration Council (SAC). On 31 July 2025, the military junta changed its name to State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC).

⁴ The National League for Democracy (NLD) is the political party that governed Burma/Myanmar from 2016 to January 2021. Led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD won landslide victories in the 2015 and 2020 General Elections. The NLD government was deposed by the Burma Army in the February 2021 Myanmar coup d’état, after which elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

widespread protests occurred across the country.⁵ In response, the Burma Army tried to crack down on protestors by using police force, but the protests continued. Finally, they used violence and lethal weapons to suppress and crack down on the protestors, which resulted in deaths and injuries. Therefore, young people and politicians bear no more patience with the actions of the Burma Army.

To continue to resist against this injustice, educated young people and politicians have sought refuge in areas, controlled by ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), which have been fighting against the dictatorship for many years. As the Burma Army continued to oppress, arrest, and imprison protestors, youths and politicians who sought refuge in ethnic areas gathered to take up arms to fight back the Burma Army. As a result, weekly military training courses were provided to youths and politicians in many places in ethnic areas. Then, the People's Défense Force (PDF)⁶ was established. The number of PDF troops increased year by year, and they joined the EAOs in various regions as they fought back against the Burma Army. The combined forces of the PDF and EAOs fought the Burma Army with a strong desire to win. As a result, the Burma Army lost many of their army camps in different areas.

This became a threat to leaders of the Burma Army. The army became increasingly demoralized and its strength declined. To address this situation, the Burma Army's leaders issued a conscription law [in 2024] as an emergency [measure]. On the other hand, the number of young people who joined the Burma Army after the 2021 coup decreased significantly because the Burma Army has been unjustly arresting and imprisoning protestors; therefore, the people do not support them. After the Burma Army issued the conscription law, many young people sought ways to escape military service by going abroad or fleeing to the EAOs in ethnic areas.

When the Burma Army implemented this law, they extorted, threatened, and imprisoned people whether or not they were on the conscription list for military service. In addition to these unjust actions, many soldiers from the Burma Army were killed in battles. It does not matter how quickly they were replaced; they have not been replaced [quickly] enough. Therefore, the Burma Army has been using force and violence against the will of the people, such as arresting passengers and travellers, and even entering civilians' homes to arrest without warning or prior notice. Among them, Maung K--- and Maung Q--- were also forcibly recruited. In April 2026, these two men escaped to ethnic areas in Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District, controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU).⁷ They surrendered to Brigade (1) of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).⁸

⁵ On 2 February 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 1 February 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.

⁶ The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the 1 February 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 5 May 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

⁷ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the 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 (NCA) in 2015, following the 2021 coup staged by Burma Army leaders, the KNU officially stated that the NCA has become void.

⁸ The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

First incident: Maung K--- (people's militia); Military ID number: XXX [Censored for security purposes]

Maung K--- is a villager from Kk--- village, Kk--- village tract,⁹ Longlon Township, Tanintharyi Division. One evening in September 2025, at 5 pm, he returned home from his work. When he was about to eat dinner, a car full of soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)¹⁰ #401 came to his house and they entered his house. Then, they arrested him. At the time he was arrested, it was a time when the Burma Army had begun to recruit new soldiers for the 17th batch of People's Military Service Training. When soldiers from LIB #401 arrested Maung K---, they hit his face twice with the butt of MA-1 gun. Then, they took him to LIB #401 army camp in Dawei Town.

Maung K--- told KHRG about his experience when he was arrested, saying: *"I went to work in the village. I came back home at around 5 pm. Then, they entered my house. They arrested me. [...] I had not taken a shower yet. I was about to eat dinner. Then, they pointed their guns at me, and they arrested me. [...] Then, they hit me twice with a gun. After that, they dragged me to their car. Then, they took me to LIB #401 army camp in Dawei Town. [...] At first, I did not know why they arrested me. I also did not expect that they would arrest me. I was just busy with my work all day. So, I did not know why they arrested me."*

Maung K--- was detained at LIB #401 army camp in Dawei Town for four days. After that, he was sent to a recruitment centre in Myeik Town [Mergui-Tavoy District] by a military ship. He was held in the centre for over a week. Then, he was again transported to a higher military training school (#12) in Palaw Town [Mergui-Tavoy District] by a military ship. He had to attend a military training in the school for four months from September 2025 to January 2026. After he attended the military training for four months, he was asked to take a break for two weeks. After this, he was sent to Light Infantry Division (LID)¹¹ #44 army camp in Kyaikto Town, Mon State [in Doo Tha Htoo District], with a military ship. He had to attend a military refresher training in the LID #44 army camp for two weeks. Then, he was sent to the frontlines in the Kone Tai area in Kawkareik Township, Karen State [in Dooplaya District]. He was assigned to serve as a security guard at the frontlines.

He stayed at the frontlines in the Kone Tai area for two months. After that, he was sent to a checkpoint at the entrance of Hpa-an Town [Doo Tha Htoo District]. This checkpoint is controlled by combined forces of the Burma Army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).¹² Then, he was again sent to Pein Net Taw army camp in Doo Tha Htoo District with a

⁹ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw is commanded by a brigadier general and consists of ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counterinsurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Tatmadaw in 1966. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, three battalions each and one reserve, one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units. Each division is directly under the command of the Chief of Staff (Army).

¹² The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was re-formed on 16 January 2016 as a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (2010 – present) and is also referred to as Na Ma Kya ('Deaf Ear'). During fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA Benevolent throughout 2015, there was internal disagreement within the DKBA Benevolent, which resulted in a number of commanders being dismissed in July 2015. These former commanders then issued a statement in January 2016 declaring the formation of a new splinter group. This DKBA Buddhist (2016 – present) should not be confused with the DKBA Benevolent (2010 – present) from which it broke away in January 2016, or with the original DKBA (1994 – 2010) which was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the

guide from the DKBA. Again, he was sent to Lay Kay army camp and Win Tar Pan army camp in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, as [part of] reinforcements. When he was sent to those army camps with the Burma Army's troops to help them as reinforcements, along the way, the KNLA attacked the Burma [Army] troops. As a result, almost everyone from the troops was killed or injured. Therefore, Maung K--- was afraid to continue the journey, and he decided to run away for the survival. Then, he surrendered to KNLA Battalion #1 on 20 April 2026. As he surrendered, the KNLA took care of him and kept him in a safe place. Maung K---'s [Burma Army] military trainer was Major Min Maw Than.

Maung K--- and many other soldiers did not want to join the Burma Army. He told KHRG about his experience and perspectives. *"Many people want to run away if they have a chance. [...] We do not have fighting experience at the frontlines. When the fighting happened, I did not shoot a gun. I just lay down and stayed like that. Some people died of hunger at the frontlines. Some people died as they stepped on landmines. I have seen this situation. That is why I was afraid to continue our journey. Then, I decided to surrender."*

Maung K--- worked as a masonry worker to support his family. He is Bamar and Buddhist. He is 23 years old and he is married. His wife was also in the house when he was arrested. His wife's name is Ma G---. According to Maung K---, Ma G--- did not even have a chance to talk to her husband when he was arrested and taken away. She felt really sad about what happened to her husband.

Second incident: Maung Q--- (Tatmadaw); Military ID number: XXX [Censored for security purposes]

Maung Q--- is from Thingangyun Township, Yangon Division. On one day in April 2024, he was sleeping on a street, as he was drunk. Two unknown people arrested him. These two people worked as recruiters for the Burma Army. Then, they put him on a bus and drove him to a military training school in Toungoo Town, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District. When he arrived there, it was a time when the Burma Army had begun to conduct the 3rd batch of People's Military Service Training.

According to Maung Q---, all kinds of people from different areas and backgrounds, including criminals, were arrested, and they were sent to recruitment centre #4 in Toungoo Town. The Burma Army forcibly recruited them and often tortured them. Maung Q--- testified that they were asked whether they wanted to be a soldier or not when they were in the recruitment centre. The Burma Army hit and beat those who answered that they did not want to be a soldier. They tortured them until they had to confess that they wanted to be a soldier. After staying in the recruitment centre for 15 days, the Burma Army reached the number of people that they wanted to be conscripted. Then, they [the forcibly recruited individuals] were sent to military training school #6 in Patheingyi Town [Ayeyarwady Region]. Maung Q--- had to attend the military training there for five months, from 1 May 2024 to 28 October 2024.

Maung Q--- told KHRG: *"They [the Burma Army] try to collect [arrest] people. Many people from different areas were arrested. Some prisoners were even arrested. They were taken out from the cell. They were asked whether they would continue to stay in jails or whether they would join the army. Some prisoners said that they wanted to join the army. Then, they were handcuffed when they were sent to the recruitment centre. There were all kinds of people, including criminals. Some of them were people with mental disabilities. Some of them were over 40 years old. Then, they [the Burma Army] took pictures of them for their records. After that, they questioned and interrogated them. During the interrogation, they [the Burma Army] asked*

DKBA Benevolent. Importantly, the DKBA Buddhist did not sign the preliminary or nationwide ceasefire with the Myanmar government, whereas the DKBA Benevolent has signed both agreements.

whether they [the arrested people] agreed to join the army or not. If people said that they did not agree, a gang of soldiers beat them and hit them. They beat and hit them until they had to say that they agreed. They beat and hit them very harshly. If anyone tried to run away, they tied them with ropes. When they got 200 people, they sent them to a military training school in Patheingyi Town with military trucks. Along the journey, they asked them again whether they agreed to join the army or not. If they said that they did not agree, then they beat and hit them again. If you say you don't agree, they beat you and they ask again. They will keep doing that until you agree."

After Maung Q--- attended the military training, he was sent to LIB #1 army camp, under the command of LID #44, in Thabon Town, Mon State [Doo Tha Htoo District], along with around ten other trainees. He stayed at LIB #1 army camp for over 20 days. Then, he was sent to Thay Baw Boh army camp, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree (Kawkaik) Township, Dooطلا District. This army camp is located near the Thoo Mweh River along the Thai-Burma border. He stayed at the camp for five months. In May 2025, combined forces of KNLA and PDF troops led by Bo¹³ Da Baw attacked and occupied the army camp. During the attack, 46 Burma Army soldiers, including Maung Q--- and the Operations Commander, surrendered to the KNLA. Then, the KNLA took them on a boat across the river, and they sent them to Thai authorities as a way to avoid detaining them.

However, the Burma Army and Thai authorities negotiated with each other. Finally, Thai authorities sent the surrendered [soldiers] back to Burma. Then, the surrendered [soldiers] were sent to LIB #545 army camp in Myawaddy Town [Dooطلا District]. LIB #545 is under the command of Military Operations Command (MOC)¹⁴ #12. Maung Q--- stayed at LIB #545 army camp for three months. Then, he was sent to LIB #1 army camp in Thabon Town again. Then, he was sent to Kq--- village, Kawkaik Township. He stayed in the village for almost three months. After this, he was sent to Lay Kay army camp and Win Tar Pan army camp as [part of] reinforcements with a guide from the DKBA.

Along the journey, Maung Q--- and his troops faced a food shortage. The Burma Army's soldiers were dying every day because of severe hunger. According to Maung Q---, his commander's management was very poor for the military operation. Therefore, many soldiers from the troop died. Maung Q--- could not even continue on the journey as he became weak because he did not get to eat food for several days. Finally, he ran away alone, and he went to places that he thought he might be able to get water. While he was running away, he encountered KNLA troops. He explained everything to the KNLA about what happened to him. Then, the KNLA provided him food and kept him in safe place. Maung Q---'s [Burma Army] upper leader was Lit. Colonel Kyaw Thu.

Maung Q--- is 30 years old. He is single. He worked as a ship worker to support his livelihood. Maung Q--- tried to think about escaping before he was sent to the frontlines, but it was not easy for him to escape. He told KHRG: *"They [the Burma Army] tied those who ran away with ropes. Then, they hit and beat them. So, it is not easy to run away. I cannot imagine what would happen to me if they catch me."*

¹³ 'Bo' is a Burmese honorific title meaning 'officer.'

¹⁴ Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

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

- [*Forced to Harm: Impacts of the State Administration Council \(SAC\)'s forced recruitment and enactment of the conscription law in Southeast Burma \(January 2024 – February 2025\)*](#), March 2025.
- [*"Taw Oo District Situation Update: SAC shelling, drone attacks, forced recruitment, threats, and other military activity, causing casualties and livelihood challenges in Htaw Ta Htoo and Daw Hpah Hkoh Townships \(November 2024 to January 2025\)"*](#), May 2025.
- [*"Mergui-Tavoy District Short Update: Forced recruitment of villagers by an SAC-affiliated militia causing displacement in Ler K'Saw Township \(December 2023 to March 2024\)"*](#), April 2024.
- [*"Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC forced recruitment and extortion of villagers, and resultant displacement in Htaw Ta Htoo Township \(January to February 2024\)"*](#), March 2024.

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.

