



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Toungoo Situation Update: Htantabin Township and Thandaunggyi Township, April to July 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Htantabin Township and Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District during the period between April and July 2017. This report includes civilians' situation, Tatmadaw activity and its' bases, health, education, KNU/KNLA (Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army) activity, infrastructure projects and landmines.

- *Since the ceasefire, villagers no longer face travel restrictions by armed groups and are now free to travel between townships in Toungoo District. However, villagers are still concerned about the fragile peace process because Tatmadaw troops remain active and have not withdrawn their troops from civilian areas.*
 - *Expensive medical costs at Burma/Myanmar government hospitals in Toungoo District make them unaffordable for villagers. Therefore, villagers must find private clinics to treat their sicknesses.*
 - *KNU schools are under-funded and receive less support than Burma/Myanmar government schools. In addition, there are still self-reliant schools in some places that have not received any support and thus have not improved, such as schools in K'Shee Hkee area, western Day Lo area, and the western Klay Wa area of Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District.*
 - *Landmines that were laid by both the Tatmadaw and the KNLA before the 2012 ceasefire have still not been removed in Toungoo District.*
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Situation Update | Htantabin Township and Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (April to July 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 2017. It was written by a community member in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including 26 photographs.²

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeast Burma/Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeastern Burma/Myanmar, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations.

Introduction

This situation update describes events that took place in Htantabin Township and Thandaunggyi Township in Toungoo District between April 23rd and July 20th 2017, including civilians' situation, Tatmadaw military activity and its' bases, health, education, KNU/KNLA [Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army] activity, infrastructure projects and landmines.

Civilians' situation

According to information received on May 1st 2017, most civilians are working on plantations, plain farming, or hill farming. In regards to jobs, the situation is good. However, there are some people who have been struggling to make a living [in their villages] and are seeking employment in other places.

Tatmadaw activity and bases

[Compared to before the Ceasefire³, when military activity restricted villagers' ability to travel] civilians now have more freedom to travel. However, in regards to peace [and the ceasefire], villagers are worried that fighting will break out again because Tatmadaw in frontline areas have not yet withdrawn their troops. Moreover, they upgraded their army camps. Villagers do not want Tatmadaw troops to be based in frontline areas. Currently there are army camps in Bu Hsa Hkee, Naw Soe, Kaw Thay Der, Lay Sel Shit Mile (48 miles), Klaw Mee Der and Hplay Hsa Lo, which are located in Htaw Ta Htoo Township. In Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, there are army camps in K'Thaw Pwee, Kerh Weh, Htee Tha Soe and Thauk Yay Khat. The villagers do not want army camps based in these areas.

In early 2017, MOC⁴ (Military Operations Command) #13 came to rotate troops with MOC #20 in Toungoo District. MOC #13 Colonel Kyaw Zeya went to Kler Lar army camp and TOC⁵

For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

³ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see ["Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups."](#) Reuters, October 15th 2015. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see ["Myanmar: UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement."](#) UN News Centre, October 15th 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe's decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see ["Without Real Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...."](#) Karen News, September 1st 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see ["Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire."](#) KHRG, May 2014.

⁴ 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.

(Tactical Operations Command) #1 Lit. Colonel Soe Moe Kyaw went to P'Leh Wa army camp.
TOC #2 Colonel Htoo Hlaing went to Bu Hsa Hkee army camp.

- During the reporting period, LIB⁶ (Light Infantry Battalion) #358 Lit. Colonel Thein Tan was based in Hplay Hsa Lo, Kaw Mee Der army camp and Major Myo Min Htun was based in Nat Th'Mee Taung army camp.
- LIB #555 Major Moe Kyaw Oo was based in Yay Tho Gyi, (triangulation point) 2906 army camp and Ba Gyi Hsan Oo was based in Maung Taing Gyi army camp.
- LIB #557 Lit. Colonel Wai Phyo Aung was based in (triangulation point)3917, Htin Shoo Taung army camp and Ba Gyi Zeya Htun was based in Bu Hsa Hkee army camp.
- LIB #558 Lit. Colonel Kyaw Myo Htike and Major Zeyar Soe were based in Hkay Poo army camp.
- LIB #559 Lit. Colonel Ye' Wut Aung was based in Maung Nweh Gyi, Nan Chein Hkwin army camp and Major Myo Min Nyut was based in Leik Pya Lay army camp.
- LIB #561 Major Zaw Nyein was based in Th'Aye Hta army camp and Major Kyaw Lwin Hein was based in Lay Sel Shit Mile (48 miles) army camp.
- LIB #585 Lit. Colonel Kyaw Zeya was based in Sel Chauk Mile (16 miles), Nesel Mile (20 miles), and P'Leh Wa army camps and Major Nyi Nyi Htun was based in Pyaung Tho, Thit Say Taung army camp.

On April 23rd 2017, the MOC commander from Kler Lar went to check that his troops had moved from Kaw Soe Hkoh army camp to Maw Hpa Der, P'Leh Wa and Sel Chauk Mile (16 miles) army camps. On April 25th 2017, LIB #358, under the wing of MOC #13, which is based in Hplay Hsa Lo army camp, gave vaccinations in Hplay Hsa Lo village. There were 30 soldiers. On April 25th 2017, Tatmadaw IB⁷ #60, which is based in Th'Byay Nyo army camp, went to patrol in Kyweh Teh Kone village. On May 6th 2017, IB #26, led by Battalion Commander Aye Thura Kyaw under the Southern Command Headquarters (Sa Pa Ka) in Toungoo District, based in Sha Si Boh army camp, went to Hsay P'Leh Ko area with 11 soldiers. Local villagers did not know what their motivation was [for going to Hsay P'Leh Ko area]. They [IB #26] also came to

⁵ Tactical Operations Command; made up of three battalions and a headquarters, usually under a Military Operations Command (MOC) and a Light Infantry Division (LID).

⁶ A Tatmadaw 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.

⁷ An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most 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. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

Kyauk Ta Lone area, where there is a pagoda located, with their guns including RPG 7s and mortar 28s.

On May 16th 2017, LIB #555 and LIB #432, under MOC #13, went to Kler Lar [army camp] with nine [military] trucks in order to rotate their troops in Th'Aye Hta army camp. Ministry of Defence, Bureau of Special Operation (BSO) #4 Commander also went along with them to Kler Lar. Tatmadaw BSO Battalions LIB #561 and LIB #560 also rotated their troops in Th'Aye Hta, Koh Day and Lay Sel Shit Mile (48 miles) on May 16th 2017. The LIB #560 Commander is Tin Lin Zaw and the LIB # 561 Commander is Kyaw Nyein.

On May 20th 2017, IB #26 Commander Aye Thura Kyaw ordered his soldiers to stay in Boh M'Ti [area]. The camp officer, Soe Moe Naing, went with 9 soldiers to the KNU forestry checkpoint in Yay Way and took the pictures. On May 22nd 2017, IB #26 Commander Aye Thura Kyaw, based in Sha Si Boh army camp, commanded his 11 [armed] soldiers to patrol in Thay Hkoh Hser Hkee area but they patrolled in a KNU delimited area.⁸ In addition, these 11 soldiers came to Sai Lad, Nway S'Pa area, which is also an area that is delimited by the KNU.

On May 27th 2017 at around 10:00 PM, IB #60 from Th'Pyay Nyo army camp, along with nine soldiers, went to Kyweh Teh Kone, Kyel Nay Aye, and Sat S'Chaung areas. They went to see the area where the KNU reserved forest is located. [From the perspective of the villagers] this activity is suspicious.⁹

Health

Since the new government [NLD¹⁰ government] came to power, there have been some small improvements in healthcare but there have not been any major changes. Malaria, diarrhoea and flu are the most common sicknesses in Toungoo District. Other diseases also happen. People in rural villages in Toungoo District, such as Khoe Hkee area, Maw Nay Pwar area, Mu Htaw K'Li Wa area, and Day Lo Mu Htaw area, have to go to KNU clinics to get treatment because

⁸ As per the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government, the Tatmadaw are only allowed to operate and travel up to 50 yards from either side of roads that connect their army camps through KNLA territory, and only within a 150 yard radius around their own army camp.

⁹ Villagers are wary of the Tatmadaw's presence near villages because villagers view their presence as a sign of potential conflict. After the ceasefire, many villagers expected the Tatmadaw and other armed group to withdraw from civilian areas. However, villagers have instead reported that there has been ongoing militarisation in the region with Tatmadaw and BGF in some cases strengthening their army camps, rotating troops, and conducting military trainings. This causes villagers to question the integrity of the ceasefire. For more insights into villagers' perspectives on military presence near villages, see '[Ongoing militarisation in southeast Myanmar](#),' KHRG, 2016. For more information on villagers' thoughts and concerns about the peace process, see Chapter 9 of '[Foundation of Fear: 25 Years of Villager's Voices from Southeast Myanmar](#),' KHRG, October 2017.

¹⁰ The National League for Democracy (NLD) is the current political party that governs Burma/Myanmar. Led by Aung San Suu Kyi and President Htin Kyaw, the NLD won the General Elections in 2015 and came into power in 2016. For more information, see '[Burma Country Report](#),' HRW, 2017, and for additional background information, '[Foundation of Fear: 25 Years of Villager's Voices from Southeast Myanmar](#),' KHRG, 2017.

the villages are located in remote areas [which are very far from town]. There are KNU clinics in Maw Nay Pwar area, Khoe Hkee area, Htee Tha Soe area, and in KNU battalion areas [KNLA army camps]. The villagers, however, have to go to nearby towns to get treatment if they suffer serious sicknesses because the KNU clinics often do not have enough medicine or the ability to treat them.

People who live in Burma/Myanmar controlled areas have to go to the government hospitals whenever they get sick. Medical services at government hospitals, however, are costly, and some people cannot afford to go. Instead, people seek treatment from outside private clinics that are more affordable.

Education

There are two types of education system in Toungoo District. There are Burma/Myanmar government schools and KNU schools. Burma/Myanmar government schools received more support from the Ministry of Education than KNU schools for school facilities, such as school materials, and buildings. Despite the support, some government schools have not improved. There are still many schools [that are not associated with the KNU or Burma/Myanmar government] that do not have enough teachers, school buildings, or school materials. This is the situation in K'Shee Hkee area, Western Day Lo area, Western Klay Wa area, Daw Hpa Hkoh [Thandaunggyi] Township, Htaw Ta Htoo [Htantabin] Township, Maw Nay Pwar and the lower part of Day Lo. These areas have not received any support from the government so their schools have not improved.

KNU/KNLA activity

The KNLA held its annual one-month long military training. In addition, On June 20th 2017, KNU leaders in Toungoo District held a bi-annual meeting that involved parts of the KNLA. The four-day meeting involved discussions about how to improve the KNLA. It was decided that the KNLA soldiers in Brigade #2 [Toungoo District] needed to be improved. In the meeting, a Brigade Commander and an Operation Commander were nominated and, the nominated Brigade Commander resigned from the JMC (Joint Monitoring Committee).¹¹

Landmines

Landmines in Toungoo District that were laid by the KNLA have not been removed. Although no new landmines have been laid by the KNLA, old landmines still remain that were planted in the

¹¹ The Joint Monitoring Committee was established at the Myanmar state and regional level in late 2015 to monitor signatories' adherence to the October 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. It considers the majority of its monitoring to be based on territorial disputes, but has been slow to respond to complaints over breaches of the NCA code of conduct, and lacks a formal complaint mechanism, or any enforcement powers. For more information see, ["Majority of joint ceasefire monitoring committee complaints are territorial disputes,"](#) The Irrawaddy, July 2017.

conflict period. It is assumed that some of the old landmines are no longer active due to their old age.¹²

There have been no new landmines laid by the Tatmadaw [in southeast Myanmar]. However, their old landmines remain underground. It is possible that since Tatmadaw's landmines are mostly made by machine, they are easy to detonate. Yet some of the KNLA leaders do not want to take out the remaining landmines because they still do not feel like Tatmadaw is trustworthy at this moment. The KNLA still keep those landmines for their protection.¹³

Infrastructure projects

There are different types of development projects occurring in Toungoo District. Currently, roads, electricity poles, and telecommunication towers are being constructed. One project is conducted by the Tun Tauk Company. They built electricity poles from Toungoo Town to Kaw Thay Der. Although this project began in 2015, the company still has not provided electricity to villagers. Plus, some poles are already damaged.

There is also a community development project related to water supply for villagers that the KORD (Karen Office of Relief and Development) and a religious organisation [Karen Baptist Convention (KBC)] are working on. Their aim is to provide water for the villagers in both townships [Htantabin Township and Thandaunggyi Township]. Some villagers have gained access to water from these organisations; yet, there are some remaining areas that have not gained access to water because it is hard for the organisations to get there.

Conclusion

The above information is based on true events in Toungoo District. Villagers have perspectives on different kinds of issues. They are concerned about the fragile peace and ceasefire and wonder, if conflict breaks out again, what they will do and where they will live. The villagers also continue to distrust the Tatmadaw. They [the villagers] want the Tatmadaw to withdraw all of their troops from frontline areas [as they feel unsafe having Tatmadaw near them].

¹² Villagers perceive that landmines laid by the KNLA pose less of a threat than landmines planted by the Tatmadaw because KNLA landmines were frequently handmade whereas Tatmadaw landmines were manufactured in China, India, Italy, U.S., Russia, and other sources. However, according to [the International Campaign to Ban Landmines](#), landmines may remain active for over 50 years and pose a threat to anyone in proximity to them. For more information on the use of landmines in the Karen State, see, [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in Eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, and [Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villager's voices from southeast Myanmar](#), KHRG, October 2017.

¹³ KHRG strongly recommends that the Myanmar Government, Tatmadaw, BGF, and ethnic armed groups (EAGs) agree to and enforce a comprehensive ban on the use of landmines and ensure the location of existing landmines are marked and made known to villagers. KHRG further recommends that before demining efforts occur, meaningful consultations are held with relevant stakeholders and local communities. In addition, the removal of landmines, unexploded ordinance, and other remnants of war must be done by trained professionals. For more information, see: [Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villager's voices from southeast Myanmar](#), KHRG, October 2017.

Further background reading on the situation in Toungoo District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, June to August 2017,” (January 2018)
- “Toungoo Interview: U A---, 2017,” (November 2017)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, November 2016 to March 2017,” (November 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Naw Ka---, October 2016,” (June 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, January 2016,” (February 2017)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)