



## Situation Update

January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021 / KHRG # 20-109-S1

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## Mu Traw District Situation Update: 2020 general election, livelihood difficulties, Tatmadaw activities, education and COVID-19 situation (August to October 2020)

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*This Situation Update describes the situation in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District during the period between August and October 2020. It describes how the local villagers are dealing with the COVID-19<sup>1</sup> situation, the new prevention measures that they need to follow, and the livelihood difficulties they face as a result of the pandemic. Travel restrictions have increased due to a local case of COVID-19, however, villagers have been able to continue education for their children. Political parties have been campaigning in some areas as part of the 2020 general election. Fighting also broke out due to Tatmadaw<sup>2</sup> activities in restricted areas, which raises concern on the part of local villagers.<sup>3</sup>*

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### Introduction

This situation update is about the situation in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District from August 4<sup>th</sup> 2020 to October 9<sup>th</sup> 2020. The main issues are related to the 2020 election, Tatmadaw activities, livelihood difficulties, COVID-19 and education.

### 2020 general election

There are five parties running in the 2020 elections in Mu Traw District. They are:

- 1) USDP (Union Solidarity and Development Party)<sup>4</sup> led by U<sup>5</sup> Soe Myint Oo (600 members)

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<sup>1</sup> Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified in December 2019 in China, and has resulted in an on-going pandemic. For more information, see WHO, "[Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)".

<sup>2</sup> Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

<sup>3</sup> The present document is based on information received in October 2020. It was provided by a community member in Mu Traw 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.

<sup>4</sup> The Union Solidarity and Development Party (Pyi Khaing Pyo in Burmese, Pa Ka Hpa in Karen) is the successor of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. It was officially registered as a political party on June 2nd 2010 and is headed by Burmese politician Than Htay who is the current chairman and retired Brigadier General in the Tatmadaw. Previously the party was run by former Burmese President and Prime Minister, Thein Sein who was in charge until 2015. In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) ousted the USDP in a landslide election, winning a majority of seats in parliament.

<sup>5</sup> U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

- 2) NLD (National League for Democracy)<sup>6</sup>
- 3) UDP (Hnin Si Party) led by U Myint Kyaw or Za Kone Zon Sung
- 4) UDP (Union Democratic Party) led by U Ra Shwe Mahn
- 5) KNDP (Karen National Democratic Party)

The parties mentioned above have been visiting the local areas and doing campaigning. UDP (Hnin Si) party told the local villagers that if they win the election, they will work for the local villagers to have a better situation [development, economy, stability] than in Singapore [which was previously less developed than Myanmar, but is now doing better than Myanmar]. KNDP said that they will help the Karen people know [their culture and history] and understand themselves [build understanding amongst themselves], and [will ensure that] Karen people [are able to] decide their own destiny. Those parties campaigned in Hsaw Klee Loh, Hker Hkoh, Pweh Pah and places near Hpapun Road.

### **Livelihood difficulties**

In August 2020, some farmers had not finished growing [and harvesting] their paddy plants yet. Those who had finished were not happy because their paddy plants died due to drought, even though the paddy [initially] sprouted well. The plants did not have enough water to grow after they sprouted. There was some water left in the farms and irrigation channel, but the water in the irrigation channel was at the bottom [was very low], and could not reach the farms. By September, the paddy plants' leaves were turning fallow. Certain places in the following village tracts<sup>7</sup> did not get enough rain: Htee Th'Daw Hta, Meh Pree, Kyaw Pah, Day Wah village tracts in Bu Tho Township and Lay Moh Hta, K'Ter Tee, Htee Th'Bluh Hta, Ma Htaw, Nah Koe Hkee, Hkoo Thoo Hta, Waw Muh, Meh Thuh Hta village tracts in Dwe Lo Township. The local villagers are now worried that they will face a rice shortage.

### **Tatmadaw activities**

In August 2020, a Tatmadaw battalion under Military Operations Command (MOC) #8,<sup>8</sup> which is based in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, did not follow the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) Code of Conduct<sup>9</sup> and trespassed into restricted areas.<sup>10</sup> As a result, fighting broke out on August 28<sup>th</sup> 2020 between this Tatmadaw battalion from K'Ser Ther Pler army camp, led by Captain Thu Rain Aung, and Karen National Liberal Army (KNLA)<sup>11</sup> Brigade #5, Battalion #102, Company #3. The fighting happened at the foot of K'Ser Ther Pler Mountain in the local villagers' farms. The local villagers worry that they will face travel and livelihood difficulties if the fighting continues to break out.

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<sup>6</sup> The National League for Democracy (NLD) is the current political party that governs Burma/Myanmar. Led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD won the General Elections in 2015 and 2020.

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

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> On October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups, 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 Karen National Union. It was followed by the adoption of a Code of Conduct by the signatories in November 2015. In February 2018, two additional ethnic armed groups signed the NCA under pressure from the Burma/Myanmar government.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

## COVID-19 situation

On March 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, healthcare workers from the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW)<sup>12</sup> from Mu Traw District provided awareness training to the local villagers on how to protect themselves and [instructed them] to wash their hands at least 4 times a day and for at least 20 seconds per time. Restrictions were placed on gatherings and meetings, and participants must stay 3 feet [0.9 metres] away from each other. The quarterly meeting of the district administrators was held from December 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2020, and although it normally lasts four days, this time it wrapped up within two and a half days. The discussion focused on the Salween Peace Park.

Villagers were instructed to return to their township by March 18<sup>th</sup> 2020 because travel restrictions and the banning of public gatherings had started to take place. Screening checkpoints were also established to check for COVID-19. Before the screening checkpoints were established, the district administrator, leaders and healthcare workers made an announcement to let the villagers know. They told the villagers to be prepared and make sure they have enough food supplies to last three months. Some villagers have experienced food problems [shortages] so the leaders have allowed them access to [buying] food two days a week, on Mondays and Fridays only.

In September 2020, one person from K'Ma Maung Town tested positive for COVID-19; three other households found nothing [were tested but the results were negative]. The Myanmar Police Force (MPF) is monitoring them because they are not allowed to go to public areas or crowded areas. Because of this local COVID-19 case, the screening checkpoints started to get more restrictive on September 20<sup>th</sup> 2020. Nevertheless, no new screening checkpoints have been set up.

The screening checkpoint at Nya Bweh Day village, Htee Th'Blu Hta village tract was moved to a location between Htee Th'Blu Hta village and the top of K'Pee Road. The T'Dwee Hkoh screening checkpoint is still in Ma Htaw village. Anyone who comes back from outside of Mu Traw district has to go into quarantine for 21 days. There are two quarantine sites; one is next to T'Dwee Hkoh clinic in Ma Htaw village tract and the other is next to Wah Tho Klah clinic in Htee Th'Blut Hta village tract.

The KDHW and local district healthcare workers set up a screening checkpoint for COVID-19 but the Myanmar government does not approve of it and they do whatever they want [government officials and soldiers are refusing to have their temperature checked when they pass through]. Although one person tested positive in September 2020, there is no other sign of the virus spreading. Three families are in quarantine and are being watched by the MPF so that they do not circulate in public. The local villagers are afraid that the virus will spread and that there will be a [full] ban on travelling, which will cause them to starve.

## Education

No.	Village tracts	Names of the villages which have schools that are still open in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District
1.	K'Ter Ti	Noh Lah, Htee Theh Lay, Pah Loh Hpoh, Poh Mah Heh, Htee K'Saw Meh, Hpah Loh Doh
2.	Lay Hpoh Hta	Lay Hpoh Hta, Moh Loh Pah, Meh Hsee Hkee, Kyoh Day, Lay Hpoh Hta, Nee Kay, Noh Kheh HTa, T'Raw Poo, Poh Gah

<sup>12</sup> The Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) is the health department of the Karen National Union. It was established in 1956 to address the lack of public healthcare resources in rural Southeast Myanmar. It currently operates a network of community-based clinics in the region, but its capabilities remain limited due to funding constraints.

3.	Ma Htaw	Ta Huh Loh, Thwa Hkoh Loh, Tha Ma Kyoo Loh, Hkaw Klah, T'Dwee Hkoh, Poh Baw Hkoh, Klaw Klee Loh
4.	Htee Th'Blut Hta	Htee Law Thee Hta, Noh Gaw, Baw Thoh Hta, Wah Thoo Klah, K'Pee Hkee, Htee Th'Blut Hta, Htoh Meh Hta, Poh Hkay, Bler Per, Pway Htaw Roo, Pway Htaw Roo
5.	T'Nay	T'Nay, Meh Poo Hkee, Kwee T'Mah, Meh Poo Hta, Kwee Day Law, Waw Way Lay
6.	Mah Lay Ler	Mah Lay Ler, Thay Kyoh, Kay Kaw, Pway Pwa, Hpaw Hta, Meh Toh Hkee
7.	Waw Muh	Waw Muh, Nya Hsah Gaw Hta, Hpoh Kheh Hta, Wah Thoh Klah, Meh Poh
8.	Hkoo Thoo Hta	Meh T'Roo Hkee, Khaw Htee Hkoh, Baw Naw Hee, Htee Nah Day, Poh Loh Hta
9.	Lay Hkaw Htee	Deh Hta, Naw Wee Hta, Pwa Weh Hta, Htee Baw Loh
10.	Meh Way	Toh Meh Hkee, Wah Thoo Loh, Kloh Hkee, Ler Wah Hkoh, Plaw Hkee, Wah Thoo Hkoh
11.	Nah Koh Hkee	K'Wah Hkee, Nah Koh Hkee, T'Nay Hpoh Klah, Nah Koh Hta, Htee Gaw hta, Auh Ray Hkee, Auh Ray Hta
12.	Meh Thuh	Meh Kaw Loh, Ma Aee Hkoh, Meh Kyee Hta, Khaw Wah, Wah Tay, Noh T'Maw. Daw Koo Hta

The schools in the villages mentioned above are operating without any problems [without curriculum changes, but are following COVID-19 prevention measures].

### **Policies/decisions made by the KNU to curb the spread of COVID-19 (September 20<sup>th</sup> 2020)**

1. People who come back from outside of Mu Traw District have to quarantine for 21 days.
2. Parents should not ask their children (students or those who have gone to work in other places [other districts or countries]) to come back from these other areas.
3. There will be a one-month travel restriction [ban] due to COVID-19.
4. Two more screening checkpoints will be set up in K'Pee Hkee and Htee Th'Blu Hta villages.
5. Meetings and schools can go on as usual. If the students are sick, get a fever or a cold, the guardians/teachers must contact the relevant leaders/responsible persons.
6. People who are working for NGOs [and CBOs/CSOs] have to follow the procedures/policies (do their work and go to their workplace directly). They should not stop or take extra time on their way in.
7. Every COVID-19 checkpoint has to carefully check travel letters. People who do not have a travel letter or a specific reason for travelling are not allowed to travel at all.
8. If people who come back from work or other places outside the district do not follow the local policies, the village leaders have to inform the security guards right away. The security guard leaders will take action immediately.

### **Composition of the [KNU] COVID-19 prevention committee in Htee Th'Blu Hta village**

No.	Names	Position	Committee Positions
1.	Saw <sup>13</sup> Kay Dah	KNLA Brigade #5, Battalion #102, Company #3, Thu Hkoh Yaw	Committee Chairperson
2.	Saw La Tay	Htee Tha'Blut Hta village tract	Committee Secretary

<sup>13</sup> Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

		judge	
3.	Saw Kway Nee	Pway Htaw Roo village head	Pwa Kweh Naw Ta [note taker]
4.	Saw Poe Nee	Htee Th'Blut Hta village tract administrator	Contact Person
5.	Saw Sah Thay	Htee Th'Blut Hta security guard administrator	In charge of taking action
6.	Saw Raw Ber Htoo	Htee Th'Blut Hta village tract, member of local organisation	In charge of checking people going in and out of the village tract
7.	Naw <sup>14</sup> Hay Blut Hser	Htee Th'Blut Hta village tract, healthcare head	Local healthcare department head <sup>15</sup>
8.	Saw Eh Say	K'Pah/ K'Pee Hkee village head	Committee member
9.	Saw Yway Nay	Wah Thoo Klah village head	Committee member

### Two Quarantine Sites

Htee Th'Blut Hta village tract, near Wah Tho Klah clinic.  
Ma Htaw village tract, near T'Dwee Hkoh clinic.

There is no [COVID-19] committee in Ma Htaw village itself [because the quarantine site is in the larger village tract].

### Conclusion

In the previous situation update (from May to July 2020), the virus had not yet reached K'Ma Maung Town. But it has now reached areas in Mu Traw District so the healthcare workers and the district leaders are taking more restrictive actions to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. The local villagers are also afraid that this virus will spread around them and that there will be increased restrictions on their travel, along with school closures that will create delays for the students.

Again, in looking at the previous reporting period, there were no problems with the paddy plants. Now the paddy plants and the leaves are becoming fallow and dying.

There have also been issues with Tatmadaw soldiers not following the terms of the NCA. The local villagers worry that if conflict increases, they will face many problems.

<sup>14</sup> Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

<sup>15</sup> A former Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) member set up a healthcare centre that is now functioning as the local health department for the village tract.

Further background reading on the human rights situation in Mu Traw District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: The Tatmadaw repeatedly fired large numbers of mortars into civilian areas and burned forests in Lu Thaw Township, January 2020 to April 2020"](#), December 2020.
- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: Militarisation, indiscriminate shelling, displacement and landmine contamination in Bu Tho Township, May to July 2020"](#), December 2020.
- ["Mu Traw District Interview: Tatmadaw artillery shelling caused displacement of villagers, on-going fears and an inability to return home, 2019"](#), December 2020.

### 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](http://www.khrq.org).

# Mutraw (Hpapun) District

