



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021 / KHRG # 21-97-S1

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## **Dooplaya District Situation Update: Civil Disobedience Movement, military activity and anti-coup protests, March 2021**

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*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in all four townships of Dooplaya District in March 2021. Civil servants involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement have fled to areas controlled by the KNU to escape from persecution by the security forces. In parallel, the SAC military has stepped up its activities in the area and declared a curfew. Local villagers are now afraid that fighting might break out due to the increased presence of government soldiers. Anti-coup protests were held in every township of Dooplaya District. Local villagers plan to hold more protests, but they do not know how the SAC military will react. On March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021, DKBA and SAC soldiers prevented around 500 villagers from attending a protest in Myawaddy.<sup>1</sup>*

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### **Civil Disobedience Movement**

In early March, we learned that people involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)<sup>2</sup> were fleeing to Dooplaya District to escape from the State Administration Council (SAC) military's<sup>3</sup> torture and killing. Many people who joined the CDM came to these townships. They are teachers and doctors. They have to flee because SAC soldiers are trying to arrest them and

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in March 2021. It was provided by a community member in Dooplaya 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>2</sup> On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 February 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> The term most commonly used in referring to Myanmar's armed forces is Tatmadaw. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Myanmar, Myanmar's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Myanmar military since the February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011, because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

kill them. They fled to the Karen revolutionary areas [to the areas controlled by the Karen National Union - KNU].<sup>4</sup> More and more people involved in the CDM are coming every day.

As of March 7<sup>th</sup> 2021, 1,310 government staff involved in the CDM had sought refuge in the KNU areas of Dooplaya District. They are from Ayeyarwady Region, Kawkaik, Mawlamyine and Hpa-an. They used to work for the following agencies: Ministry of Health and Sports; Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation; Ministry of Internal Affairs (Myanmar Police Force, Fire Service Department); Ministry of Education; Ministry of Construction; Ministry of Electricity and Energy; Ministry of Transport and Communications; Ministry of Social Welfare and Resettlement; Ministry of Defence (SAC military); Ministry of Justice; and Myanmar Economic Bank. There are also municipal employees, township-level staff and village administrators [General Administration Department].

[There could be even more people involved in the CDM in KNU areas]. Some name lists have not been sent [by local administrators] to the [KNU] township and district [authorities] yet [local authorities must report new arrivals of people involved in the CDM to the KNU]. Some of them [people involved in the CDM] are hiding in villages and the village heads have not sent their names yet [to the KNU authorities]. We are not sure whether more people involved in the CDM will come to our areas.

### **Military activity**

The SAC military cut down bamboo in A--- village, Pone Yay village tract,<sup>5</sup> Kaw T'Ree Township to strengthen their army camp [KHRG was not able to establish the exact date]. The local villagers told them that SAC soldiers were not allowed to trespass into the restricted areas.<sup>6</sup> [The soldiers did not threaten or do anything to the local villagers but they did not listen to them and trespassed anyway]. Their commanding officer was Aung Zaw Lin, a deputy company commander from Infantry Battalion (IB)<sup>7</sup> #13, Column #1.

The SAC military is stepping up its activities in the local areas. Since the military coup,<sup>8</sup> the local villagers have been seeing more SAC soldiers in the jungle or bushes around the villages, including in Kheh Hkoh [a place where villagers go to collect T'La Aw leaves], between B--- and C--- villages, Kyauk Hkee village tract, Kawkaik Township. Therefore, the local villagers are now afraid to go and collect Ta La Aw leaves.

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<sup>4</sup> The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar 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 in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

<sup>5</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>6</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>7</sup> An Infantry Battalion (IB) 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.

<sup>8</sup> On February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, the Myanmar military deposed the democratically elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military proclaimed a year-long state of emergency and transferred power to Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed Forces. Based on unproven fraud allegations, the Tatmadaw invalidated the landslide victory of the NLD in the November 2020 General Election and stated it would hold new elections at the end of the state of emergency. The coup d'état occurred the day before the Parliament of Myanmar was due to swear in the members elected during the 2020 election. Elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

Since the protests against the military coup started, it has not been easy for patients to go to the hospital [because healthcare staff is participating in the CDM]. They have to buy medicine from outside [at the pharmacy]. One of the children from D--- village, Waw Loo village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township had a motorbike accident. He was sent to the hospital, but there was no one to look after him, give him medicine and clean his wounds. [KHRG was not able to establish the exact date of this incident].

The students who attend Myanmar government schools could not go to school this year. Since the first wave of COVID-19, they have to work instead. However, Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)<sup>9</sup> schools are still open. Local villagers/civilians are concerned that fighting [between the SAC military and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>10</sup>] might break out. They have to live in fear now. Some of them are getting ready and storing food such as rice because they worry the situation might go back to what it was the past [before the 2012 preliminary ceasefire].<sup>11</sup>

We realised that the SAC military had been stepping up its activities since March 7<sup>th</sup> 2021. They patrol at night, but we are not sure whether they are trying to find and arrest people who joined the protests; or if they are trying to find KNLA soldiers and shoot them. It creates concerns among local villagers. The SAC military also sent drones to KNU-controlled areas. SAC soldiers are now checking people on the main roads. They check people who go to Seikkyi Town, and sometimes they even check their phones. This is not happening every day, but they conduct surprise checks.

On March 19<sup>th</sup> 2021 at midnight, SAC soldiers from IB #32 shot at a group of Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)<sup>12</sup> soldiers in Kyainseikgyi Town. The DKBA soldiers were in the streets after 9 pm despite the curfew. They [SAC soldiers] could not kill any of them but they arrested one of them. We do not know what they did to him. The SAC military declared a curfew. No one can go out after 9 pm since March [but not everyone knows about the curfew]. These are just some of the SAC military activities this month [in March].

### **Anti-coup protests**

In reaction to the military coup, protests were organised and held in every township of Dooplaya District. The demands of the protesters are: 1) Restore democracy; 2) Abolish the military dictatorship; 3) Free the detained people; 4) Abolish the 2008 Constitution; 5) Establish a federal Union; 6) We do not want influential nationalism [Burmanisation]; and 7) All ethnic groups should be united.

On March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021, around 500 villagers from Thay Baw Boe, Maw Hkee and Su Klee village tracts, Kawkareik Township planned to hold a protest against the military coup in Myawaddy. However, they were stopped by DKBA and SAC soldiers on their way [to the city], so they could not hold the protest in Myawaddy. On the same day, local villagers from Aw Hpa Hpa Doh village tract, Kawkareik Township held a protest against the military on the Asia Highway.

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<sup>9</sup> The Karen Education and Culture Department is the education department of the Karen National Union. Its main goals are to provide mother tongue education services to rural Karen populations in Southeast Myanmar, as well as to preserve the Karen language, culture and history. Despite being an important education provider in the region, it is not officially recognised by the Myanmar government.

<sup>10</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>11</sup> On January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way.

<sup>12</sup> In 1992, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) split from the KNLA over religious considerations. In 2010, the majority of DKBA troops transformed into BGFs, but one faction refused and changed its name to Democratic Karen Benevolent Army in 2012. They signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in October 2015.

The local villagers from Kawkareik Township and Kruh Tuh Township held a protest on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2021, and they plan to hold more protests in the future. They are going to hold protests in each of those townships on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2021. We heard that the SAC soldiers do not want the local villagers to hold protests. Therefore, we do not know what the situation will be on the days of the protests and we will have to monitor it. There are ongoing protests against the military because the local villagers are against military rule.

Further background reading on protests against the 2021 military coup in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: Villagers protest against the military coup in Hpapun and K'Ma Maung towns, Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2021"](#), June 2021.
- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021"](#), May 2021.
- ["An End to Peace Efforts: Recent fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw following the 2021 Myanmar military coup \(March and April 2021\)"](#), May 2021.

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

# Dooطلا (Southeastern Karen State) District

