



Situation update of IDPs

in Mutraw (Papun) and Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) Districts

with the recent armed conflict between Tatmadaw and KNLA
Northern Karen State and Eastern Bago, Burma/Myanmar

Date: 29 January, 2021

*“We have to flee as the Burma Army is shelling us every day”
a mother as she held her baby.*

ABOUT KPSN



Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) is the largest network of Karen civil society organizations in Burma/Myanmar. KPSN member organizations have facilitated humanitarian support for vulnerable conflict-affected Karen communities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees for decades. KPSN works to empower local Karen communities, raise awareness of the peace process, document human rights issues, and facilitate advocacy for a sustainable and equitable peace in Karen areas of Burma.

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1. Background

Conflict between the Karen National Union (KNU) and Myanmar has reached its most intense level since the ceasefire between them was signed in 2012, threatening to break the ceasefire agreement.

Despite the ceasefire, in 2017 heavily guarded Burma Army vehicles began work to expand and upgrade two old dirt roads connecting a string of military bases in Karen lands. The first road runs south from the Bu Sa Kee area of Taw Oo (Toungoo) District and connects with the east-west Kaypu - Pla Koh - Saw Hta road all the way to the Salween River and cutting through northern Mutraw District. The second road which starts from the Mu Theh area of Kler Lwee Htoo District then curves north to connect with the Pla Kho - Saw Hta road. The Burma military claims that these roads will bring the benefits of development to local communities. However, it is evident, especially to local communities, that the road is being used to increase troop deployment and to supply the increasingly fortified Burma military encampments that dominate part of their lands. It is of particular concern to the KNU because in the event of breakdown of the increasingly fragile ceasefire, the improved road access would enable the Burma Army to quickly move and block Karen civilian and military movement in core KNU territories in northern Karen State.

The ceasefire terms require agreement from both sides to undertake road construction in each other's areas. Villagers and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) declined to give permission to the Burma military to upgrade the road, which cuts through a key farming area for local people where communities remain traumatized from the long civil war.

Despite repeated protests by local communities against the road construction and acts of violence against them, since 2018 the military has pushed ahead with its roadmaking. This has occurred alongside the Myanmar military expanding its presence through increased patrols, greater troop numbers, and further fortification of some of their existing camps in violation of the ceasefire terms. Road construction in this area has been historically connected to numerous military operations and large-scale displacement of local people. People therefore perceive the current Burma Army activities as being in the same aggressive spirit as the Burma Army's actions in their area both before and since the ceasefire agreement, and its well-known provocations and abuses against the Kachin, the Rohingya, the Shan and other ethnic nationalities.

Skirmishes have broken out between the Burma Army and KNLA since the beginning of the road construction. Numerous recent acts of violence by Burma Army units including shootings, mortar fire, burning of houses, and extension of patrols into areas people formerly considered safe, have become a significant security threat to local villagers and have been highly disruptive of people's livelihoods.

Some of the more conspicuous incidents linked to the road construction include the killing of village leader Saw Oo Moo by Burma Army LIB 351 troops on April 5th, 2018 while he was on a trip to organize a meeting for humanitarian assistance for IDPs who had been hiding from the Burma Army's expansion in Ler Mu Plaw village tract¹. On the 5th March 2020 Saw Maw Aye Than, a Karen forest ranger travelling along the road was shot dead. Then on 31st March 2020, local judge Saw Thet Mee was shot and killed trying to cross the road. On July 16th, 2020, two Burma Army LIB 409 soldiers shot and killed a villager from Poh Loh Hta village, Naw Mu Naw, and stole her earrings and the necklace she was wearing².

1 <https://khrgh.org/2018/06/18-3-nb1/karen-community-leader-saw-o-moo-was-murdered-tatmadaw-forces-hpapun-district-april>

2 <https://khrgh.org/2020/07/statement-killing-naw-mu-naw-two-tatmadaw-soldiers>

On the 1st of December, 2020 the KNLA released a statement urging the Burma Army to withdraw by the end of December from new military camps it has established in Mutraw District, including some located directly inside Karen villages where they have greatly disturbed the local people. Instead of withdrawing, the Burma Army reinforced its troops in those areas. The same day, Burma Army LIB 603 troops fired mortar rounds into one of the villages. Since early January fighting has further escalated in Mutraw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts with the Burma Army firing mortars into villages after clashes with KNLA soldiers.

On 12th of January 2021, a 35-year-old village headman was killed by a Burma Army LIB 404 mortar shell. Then on the 15th of January 2021 a mortar fired by Burma Army LIB 339 troops severely injured a 12-year-old boy from Mae Way village. Luckily, so far he has survived the head injury. On January 19th, in a part of Kler Lwee Htoo District where armed conflicts are escalating, two villagers, U Tar aged 57, and Kyi Poe aged 42, died on the street as a result of reckless shooting by Burma Army soldiers. Also on the 19th, a Pah Kaw Hkee villager was wounded in the head and thigh from a Burma Army mortar shell fired into the village. On January 24th the Burma Army burned down a house in Mae Way village leading all of the villagers to flee into the jungle³.

Currently, there are 69 Burma Army camps in Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglinbin) District⁴ and 83 Burma Army camps located in Mutraw District⁵ where communities are trying to establish the Salween Peace Park. While the number of military camps in Kler Lwee Htoo District has not increased during the ceasefire period, the number of Burma Army troops stationed there has almost doubled. The situation is worse in Mutraw District where 12 new Burma Army bases have been established and troop numbers have substantially increased.



IDPs hiding from Burma Army in the jungle, Mutraw District



Children in Htee Khae Khee village, Lermuplaw tract, Mutraw District, have to study in a trench due to Burma Army mortar shelling

³ KNLA statement dated 27 January 2021, “

⁴ KNLA Brigade 3

⁵ KNLA Brigade 5

2. Urgent humanitarian situation

“The Burma Army shelled and fired machine guns most of the morning”

a Free Burma Rangers relief worker⁶

Because of the indiscriminate attacks from the Burma Army, civilians have fled their villages and are hiding in the jungle. They do not have adequate shelter, access to clear water and latrines and they are running out of food. The Burma Army is frustrating humanitarian access and are denying civilians access to assistance.

There are approximately 5,326 IDPs that have fled the recent conflict. The weather is seriously cold in areas where the fighting has broken out in both Kler Lwee Htoo and Mutraw, with temperatures potentially dropping below 4 degree Celsius at night. Children, elders and pregnant women are facing the most difficulty while trying to hide in the forest.

If the fighting escalates further and continues over the coming months it will be extremely hard for the IDPs to remain in the jungle and to survive. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the situation will be extraordinarily difficult for these IDPs if they try to flee to other areas, especially if they were to try to cross the border into Thailand to seek refuge, as was the case in the past.

In the medium to long term, civilians will be very worried about returning to their villages and fields because these areas can be contaminated by unexploded mortar shells (UXOs). This will be an additional threat to their livelihoods and their ability to resume their lives.



IDPs hiding from Burma Army in the jungle, Kler Lwee Htoo District

⁶ Free Burma Rangers, “Families flee Burma shelling to day 27 January 2021. Keh Der village, Nyaunglinbin, Karen State”

3. Donations and relief support

Bringing relief aid for IDPs through government-controlled areas as per usual will be obstructed by the Burma Army. A number of groups, including Karen Youth Network, brought rice, oil, clothes and other basic needs for the IDPs in Kler Lwee Htoo but due to the Burma Army's blockage no support has reached the IDPs yet. Please contact KPSN or its network organizations for details on providing IDP support. People who have fled from the fighting urgently need non-perishable dry foods, blankets, warm clothes, hammocks, and other basic needs. Most of all the needs, FOOD is the most urgent need for them.

4. IDP population

The number of IDPs has increased greatly due to the Burma Army's mortar shelling into the villages and farmlands. The actual number of IDPs could be higher than shown in the following tables.

Table 1. Total number of displaced in Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) and Mutraw (Papun) Districts, Karen State

No.	District	Village	Village tract	Township	HH	Population		
						M	F	Total
1	Kler Lwee Htoo District	5	2	Ler Doh (Kyauk Kyi)	148	617	578	1195
2	Mutraw District	17	5	Dwe Lo	690	2055	2076	4131
	Total	23	7		838	2672	2654	5326

Table 2. Number of displaced populations in Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglinbin) District

No.	Village	Village tract	Township	HH	Population		Total
					M	F	
1	Ta Kaw Der	Keh Der	Ler Doh (Kyauk Kyi)	38	126	118	244
2	Keh Der	Keh Der	Ler Doh (Kyauk Kyi)	31	100	101	201
3	Pa Kaw Khee	Keh Der	Ler Doh (Kyauk Kyi)	46	185	161	346
4	Htee Hser Day	Saw Kar Der	Mone (Kyauk Kyi)	17	145	138	283
5	Htoo Htar	Keh Der	Ler Doh (Kyauk Kyi)	16	61	60	121
	Total			148	617	578	1195

Note

- The villagers from Htee Hser Day, Htoo Htar, Pa Kaw Khee, Ta Kaw Der villages fled from their village and hid in the jungle on January 11, 2021.
- The villagers from Keh Der village fled from their village and hid in the jungle on January 18, 2021.

Source: CIDKP

Table 3. Number of displaced populations in Mutraw (Papun) District

No.	Village	Village tracts	Township	HH	Age		Population		Total
					- 5	+ 5	M	F	
1	Wa Tho Kho	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	64	26	307	156	177	333
2	T'yar Per Kho	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	17	18	94	58	54	112
3	Noh Boe Loh	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	12	28	119	73	74	147
4	Wa Tho Loh	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	55	48	356	196	208	404
5	Day Law Pu	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	38	46	197	136	107	243
6	Klo Kee	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	72	80	399	251	228	479
7	To Mae Kee	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	44	38	202	121	119	240
8	Kaw Poe Kee	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	31	33	141	77	97	174
9	Mae Way (upper)	Mae Way	Dwe Lo	96	37	367	194	210	404
10	Hto Koe Kyaw Kee	Mae Thu	Dwe Lo	21	28	110	67	71	138
11	Kaw Wah	Mae Thu	Dwe Lo	27	34	152	88	98	186
12	Mae Pu Hta	T'Nae	Dwe Lo	51	40	274	160	154	314
13	Mae Pu Kee	T'Nae	Dwe Lo	25	38	121	76	83	159
14	T'Nae	T'Nae	Dwe Lo	45	47	245	149	143	292
15	Kaw Htee Koh	Ku Thu Hta	Dwe Lo	28	24	126	75	75	150
16	Ku Thu Hta	Ku Thu Hta	Dwe Lo	34	16	123	66	73	139
17	Kay Kaw	Ma Lay Ler	Dwe Lo	30	29	188	112	105	217
Total				690	610	3521	2055	2076	4131
Source: Mutraw District									

5. KPSN Recommendations

To the Burmese government and the Burma Army:

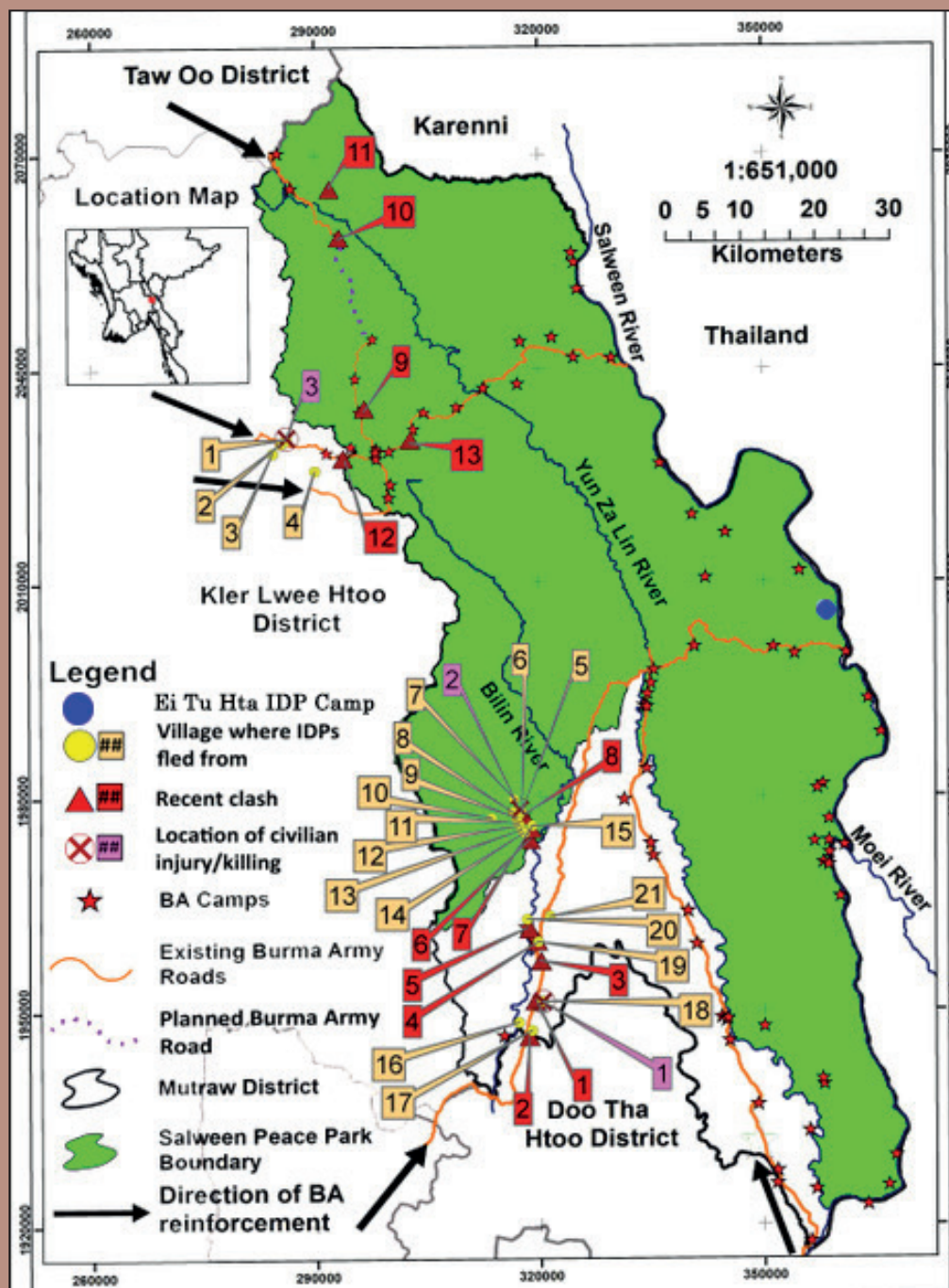
- To immediately stop all road construction in Mutraw and Kler Lwee Htoo
- To stop all offensive military operations, including drone surveillance, and pull back troops from Karen areas

To the international community

- To call publicly for the Burma Army to stop its military offensive in Karen State
- To stop business as usual with Burma, and exert diplomatic and economic pressure for an end to Burma Army offensives throughout the country, so that inclusive dialogue towards a new federal constitution can begin
- To stop investing in and funding development, infrastructure and resource extraction projects in Karen areas through the Burmese government. Such projects should only be considered when there is lasting peace, and power is devolved under a new federal constitution, giving local communities the right to decide on their own development
- To provide humanitarian aid cross-border to displaced communities in eastern Burma
- To resume adequate levels of humanitarian aid to refugees in camps on the Thai-Burma border

6. Map

Karen Current Displacement



Locations numbered in map

Clash locations

1	Ko Ko Hkoh
2	Brigade 5 and Brigade 1 border
3	Poh Loh Hta
4	Hku Thu Hta
5	Kay Koh
6	Meh Paw Hta
7	Between Wah Tho Loh and Kloh Hkee
8	Meh Way
9	Hpah Gaw Loh
10	Hsa Law Kyoh
11	Khaw Daw Hkoh
12	K'Ser T'Kwee
13	Ku Kwar Hkoh

Villages where IDPs fled from

1	Per Kaw Hkee
2	Kheh Der
3	T'Kaw Der
4	Htoo Hta
5	Meh Way
6	Kloh Hkee
7	Khaw Wah
8	T'Yar Pher Hkoh
9	Toh Meh Hkee
10	Htoo Kaw Kyaw Hpoh
11	Day Law Pu
12	Baw Naw Loh
13	Wah Tho Hkoh
14	Wah Tho Loh
15	Khaw Hpoh Hkee
16	Meh Pu Hta
17	Meh Pu Hkee
18	T'Nay
19	Hku Thu Hta
20	Kay Koh
21	Khaw Hkee Hkoh

Locations of civilian injury/killing

1	Ter Nay Taw
2	Meh Way
3	Per Kaw Hkee