



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

23 January 2019 / KHRG # 18-63-D1

Hpapun Situation Update: Fighting breaks out between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA in Lu Thaw Township

This Short Update covers events that occurred in Lu Thaw Township between the 17th and 19th of January 2019.¹ Tatmadaw soldiers trespassed into KNU-controlled areas to carry out road construction activities, resulting in skirmishes with the KNLA.

Territorial skirmishes

On 17 January 2019, Tatmadaw soldiers trespassed into KNU controlled areas, which resulted in a skirmish with KNLA units in Hsoh Poh Kyoh, Ler Muh Plaw village tract. At 1:35 PM, the KNLA also opened fire on Tatmadaw trucks circulating near Htee Pweh and Kuh Day villages, Hpla Hkoh village tract. [Radio Free Asia reported that another skirmish took place in Baw Hser Hkoh, Ler Muh Plaw village tract on the same day, in the context of road construction activities by the Tatmadaw. The fighting resulted in the death of a Tatmadaw soldier.]²

Later that day, the Tatmadaw sent a bulldozer from Htaw Muh Pleh Meh military camp to Wa Klay Too village, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, and to Saw Muh Plaw village tract. [This confirms that the Tatmadaw is resuming road construction activities in the area. In 2018, these activities had resulted in several skirmishes with the KNLA, leading to the displacement of 3,088 civilians in the period between March and May.³ The road project was ultimately halted on 17 May 2018 following a meeting between the KNU chairman and the Tatmadaw chief, Sen. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing.]⁴

On 18 January 2019, more skirmishes occurred in Htee Pweh and Khu Day villages, Hpla Hkoh village tract. No KNLA casualties were reported. No information was received regarding the Tatmadaw soldiers involved. On 19 January 2019, renewed skirmishes between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA took place in the same localities. [According to the local media website Karen News, skirmishes between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw had already occurred on the 5th and 13th of January 2019 between Ler Muh Plaw and Saw Muh Plaw village tract.]⁵ If this trend continues, it could lead to displacement in Lu Thaw Township and endanger the ongoing peace process.

¹ The present document is based on information provided by a community member in Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground.

² Radio Free Asia (January 2019), "[The KNU attacks the Tatmadaw in Hpapun District](#)" (available in Burmese).

³ Footnote to 18-63-S1.

⁴ The Irrawaddy (May 2018), "[Tatmadaw Agrees to Halt Contentious Road Project in Karen State](#)".

⁵ Karen News (January 2019), "[The new year starts with armed conflict between Karen and Burma armies in northern Karen State](#)".

A local source reported to KHRG that the Tatmadaw carried out reconnaissance missions into KNU controlled areas to establish where KNLA units and the local population were based. In addition to this, the Tatmadaw fired mortars and warning shots near inhabited areas to scare the local population. Local villagers fear that they might be forced to flee. They have reportedly packed supplies and are ready to flee their homes if the fighting escalates. This would undermine their freedom of movement and disrupt their access to education, food and healthcare services. It would also threaten their livelihoods, as most of them rely on farming.

Under the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the Tatmadaw and the Ethnic Armed Organisations must avoid any direct or indirect action that may be regarded as hostile, as well as reconnaissance missions, armed attacks and destruction of property in ceasefire areas. They should also confine their troops within designated areas, and avoid confrontation in areas where there is direct contact between the troops by acting immediately using any method of communication. They must also obtain prior authorisation to operate within each other's territory. The Tatmadaw violated these terms by conducting road construction activities in a KNU controlled area without prior permission. This is an ongoing issue that has already resulted in armed clashes in 2018. Instead of responding with violence, both parties should refer these types of issues to the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee to avoid causing displacement and harm to local communities.

Further background reading on the Tatmadaw road construction activities in Hpapun District can be found in the following KHRG report:

["Hpapun Incident Report: Tatmadaw road construction results in the indiscriminate firing of mortars and displacement in Lu Thaw Township, March 2018"](#), (June 2018)

January 2019 Fighting in Hpapun District



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