

Introduction to the problem

During the Tatmadaw's offensives in 2006 and 2007, Tatmadaw soldiers built a north-south road connecting their camps of Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu. Many smaller camps were also built along this roadway. The KNLA fought to regain this area and by the end of 2011 the Tatmadaw no longer used the road between Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu and had withdrawn from their small camps in between.

The Tatmadaw now seeks to rebuild and upgrade this as a military operation road. Since March 4, 2018, the Tatmadaw has deployed more than 1,000 additional troops into Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts, Luthaw Township, northern Mutraw (Hpapun) District. Since the Tatmadaw soldiers have entered KNLA territory without obtaining permission, armed clashes have broken out almost daily between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers (see conflict timeline).

The Tatmadaw's military operations and road-building efforts have already caused great hardship for local people, and if the Tatmadaw succeeds in rebuilding a military road here, Indigenous Karen villagers may be permanently displaced from their ancestral lands.

Immediate impacts on local villagers of the Tatmadaw's current operations

Since February 27, the Tatmadaw has:

- Shot at villagers while they were trying to gather their rice (at least 4 times);
- Shot and killed at least two of the villagers' buffalo;
- Repeatedly fired mortar shells into villagers' fields;
- Repeatedly shot at villagers before crossing the line into KNLA territory.
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Nearly **2,300** villagers, including elders, women and children, have fled their homes and are taking temporary shelter in the forest, while more than **600** additional villagers are preparing to flee. IDPs are suffering from:

- Cold nighttime temperatures.
- Colds, fevers, and other sicknesses.
- Psychological trauma.
- Lack of shelter, blankets, and warm clothing.
- Shortage of medicine and food.

Villages the residents of which have fled					
Village Name	Number of Households	Village tract	Total Population		
			Male	female	total
1. Tru Kee or Taw Kue Mu Der	35	Kay Pue	134	146	280
2. T' May Kee	10	Kay Pue	47	37	84
3. ThayThoo Kee	38	Kay Pue	152	164	316
4. Boh Nar Der	21	Kay Pue	83	74	157
5. Shoe Pur Kho	48	Kay Pue	168	169	337
6. Htee Ley Kha Kee	19	Saw Mu Plaw	58	88	146
7. Be Kho Dor	19	Saw Mu Plaw	64	63	127
8. Blaw Kho	13	Saw Mu Plaw	40	55	95

9. He Gho Loh Der	23	Lermu Plaw	107	102	209
10. Ler Mu Plaw	50	Lermu Plaw	183	181	364
11. Htee Ghae Dee	17	Lermu Plaw	97	83	180
Total	293		1133	1162	2295

Villages the residents of which are prepared to flee					
Village Name	Number of Households	Village tract	Total Population		
			Female	Male	total
1. Htee Hse Kee	11	Kaypue	63	58	121
1. Htee Bway Kee	15	Kaypue	63	51	114
2. Theh Kee	29	Sawmuplaw	70	81	151
3. Theh Hsar Kee	18	Sawmuplaw	72	79	151
5. Hser Hti	10	Lermuplaw	31	36	67
total	83		299	305	604

If the Tatmadaw soldiers do not withdraw, displaced villagers will face food shortages in the coming year. Now is the time that villagers prepare upland fields (khu = hill fields) for cultivation; villagers have been forced to flee and cannot finish clearing their fields. In addition, if the soldiers do not withdraw soon, villagers will not be able to plough and plant their lowland paddy fields before the rains in May. The Tatmadaw's road-building activities will impact an estimated 245 to 275 irrigated paddy fields.

Medium and long-term impacts on local villagers' lives and livelihoods:

The Tatmadaw's military roads are a source of great fear for local villagers, since they facilitate movement of Tatmadaw troops and heavy weapons. Villagers are often in danger of being shot by Tatmadaw soldiers near these roads. For example, Saw Maw Kay, a Khershorter Community Forest ranger in Luthaw township, was shot dead by Tatmadaw soldiers at 10:00 AM on February 22, 2015 while he and other villagers were clearing their upland rotational farms.

Villagers are afraid to live or farm near existing Tatmadaw military roads that pass near their former villages, farmlands and community forests, preventing IDPs and refugees from returning to their ancestral lands. The Tatmadaw's plan to rebuild its road through villagers' lands in Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts threatens to permanently displace villagers from even more of their ancestral lands and villages, pushing them further into poverty and food insecurity.

Karen CSOs estimate that the following irrigated farmlands will be affected if the Tatmadaw succeeds in rebuilding its military road in this area:

- Ler Mu Plaw (over 150 farms)
- Baw Ka Plaw (20 to 30 farms)
- Tha May Hta Plaw (10 to 20 farms)

- Kay Pu Plaw (50 to 60 farms)
- Another area in Htee Poe Khi that will be cut by the military old road (around 15 farms)
- **TOTAL: at least 245 to 275 farms**

These farms can feed at least 2,000 to 3,000 people. If the Tatmadaw does not withdraw its troops and stop its road-building activities, these people will face long-term food insecurity.

After the 2012 ceasefire and starting in 2013, villagers began farming in areas close to the old abandoned road and in 2016. Many villagers began moving back to the area between Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu. These villagers, from 11 villages, have now all fled once again to hide in the forests.

Impacts on Indigenous Karen culture and community-based conservation efforts

The planned road segment runs through Indigenous Karen people's customary village territories (*Kaw*). Since the ceasefire began in 2012, local communities in this area have begun restoring their traditional Indigenous customary administrations to manage and care for their waters, lands, forests, and natural resources. The Tatmadaw's activities undermine these efforts by forcing people to flee their ancestral lands.

The Tatmadaw's military operations and road construction activities undermine local communities' efforts to protect community forests and biodiversity, including the Kheshorter Community Forest, 14,600 acres of old-growth forest, home to at least 8 globally-endangered species.

Local communities in this part of Mutraw are actively involved in co-creating the Salween Peace Park. The Salween Peace Park represents

- Local people's efforts to build inclusive peace and federal democracy;
- Local people's efforts to protect their natural heritage: water, land, forest, and wildlife;
- Local people's efforts to preserve their unique Indigenous Karen culture and Indigenous nature stewardship practices;
- Local people's vision for sustainable community-based development.

The Tatmadaw's military operations, in addition to violating the NCA, also undermine this grassroots community-based contribution to the peace process in Karen State.

In sum, the Tatmadaw's military operations and road construction activities:

- Endanger villagers' lives, personal security, and food security;
- Undermine local villagers' efforts to restore their villages, farmlands, cultural practices, and customary land;
- Threaten to permanently displace Indigenous Karen villagers from their ancestral lands;
- Undermine local people's efforts to protect their community forests and establish the Salween Peace Park.

Therefore, it is essential for local villagers' lives and well-being that the Tatmadaw immediately withdraw its troops back to previously-established bases and roads, and that Tatmadaw soldiers immediately cease all road construction activities in this area.

Conflict Timeline

Tuesday, February 27

- At 1:40 p.m., Tatmadaw troops shot at a villager, Saw Tha Aye, and his friends who crossed the road close to Sheh Kyo and Ta Keh Der village. No one was wounded.

Thursday, March 1

- At 6:00 p.m., the Tatmadaw shot at a villager, Saw Ko Lah Pya, close to Kaw Ter Der village while crossing road. No injuries.

Sunday, March 4

- Tatmadaw Battalions #20, #351, #439, #598 arrive from the south near Htoh Moh Pleh Meh and descend to Ler Mu Plaw.
- Tatmadaw Battalions #556 and #560 arrive from the north near Hsa Law Joh and cross into KNLA territory between the two camps.
- By 5 PM, villagers had begun to flee from the advancing soldiers.
- Tatmadaw and KNLA troops clashed twice during the day.
- At 10:00 a.m. the Tatmadaw troops from Hsa Law Kyo camp fired mortars and machine gun toward Paw Na Kyo. One mortar round landed close to Tha May See and Kay Pu rice field.

Monday, March 5

- At 10:00 a.m., the Tatmadaw shot at a villager, Saw Dah Bay. No injuries.
- At 12:00 p.m., Tatmadaw troops enter Ler Mu Plaw.
- 12:15 PM: Shooting between Tatmadaw and KNLA troops took place in Ler Mu Plaw. No reported injuries.
- 12:30 PM: More shooting in Ler Mu Plaw.
- 1:00 p.m.: The Tatmadaw troops a flew reconnaissance drone and shot guns in many different directions.
- 8:40 p.m.: The Tatmadaw troops killed two buffalos in Ler Mu Plaw.
- 9:00 PM: More shooting

Tuesday, March 6

- At 9:00 a.m., Tatmadaw troops from Kay Pu camp went down to Baw Na Jo and shot at one Karen home guard soldier.
- 12:50 – 1:20 PM: Shooting again. No injuries reported.
- Tatmadaw soldiers dig trenches and forward positions in Ler Mu Plaw
- In Kay Pu, Tatmadaw soldiers shoot at KNLA troops.
- Five additional clashes broke out during the day in various locations.
- In the evening, some displaced villagers come down from the hills and retrieved some of their belongings.

Wednesday, March 7

- 5:00 a.m.: Shooting between KNLA and Tatmadaw troops, (location not confirmed).
- Tatmadaw troops advanced into KNLA territory beyond the permitted area and arrive near Dee Thu Kee Village. Clash broke out between KNLA and Tatmadaw troops.
- After 9 PM, Tatmadaw soldiers in Ler Mu Plaw area shoot at villagers coming to collect their rice.

Thursday, March 8

- 3:40 PM: Tatmadaw troops clashed with KNLA troops at Ler Mu Plaw; Tatmadaw soldiers advanced to Way Day Kyoh, inside the Baw Htaw Kyoh community forest.
- 7:00 PM: Tatmadaw soldiers in Ler Mu Plaw shot at villagers coming to collect their rice.
- In Kay Pu area, Tatmadaw troops checked out KNLA post near Wah Kho Day with telescope. The KNLA troops shot at them.

Saturday, March 10

- Tatmadaw troops fired on KNLA troops near Kay Pu.
- A column of Tatmadaw troops advanced into KNLA territory, beyond permitted area. KNLA troops fired on them.

Sunday, March 11

- 6 Tatmadaw military trucks arrived at Hsa Law Kyoh.
- Over 200 additional Burmese soldiers arrived at Hsa Law Kyoh (Kay Pu).

Monday, March 12

- Tatmadaw soldiers were clearing the old road with machetes. (Later news reports confirmed that bulldozers had arrived as well.)

Friday, March 16

- Reports that over 1000 Tatmadaw soldiers were now in Kay Pu – Ler Mu Plaw area.
- Between 7:15 and 8:00 PM, shooting took place near Ler Mu Plaw (KNLA troops fired warning shots; Tatmadaw soldiers responded by firing their heavy mortars).

Saturday, March 17

- Between 8:00 am to 10:00 am, in Ler Mu Plaw, KNLA and Tatmadaw troops exchanged mortar and machine gun fires.

Sunday, March 18

- Evening, near Ler Mu Plaw village, KNLA and Tatmadaw troops exchanged mortar and machine gun fires.

Monday, March 19

- IDP situation report prepared for KNU Mutraw District.
 - 2296 people from 11 villages have fled into hiding in the forest.
 - 604 people from 5 villages have made preparations in case they need to flee.

Wednesday, March 21

- 9:17 AM: Shooting at Ta Ri Plaw.
- 12:20 PM: Shooting at Ta Ri Plaw.

Thursday, March 22

- 17:20 PM: Fighting took place at Baw Taw Poe Kyo.
- 15:20 PM: Tatmadaw sent in more troops from Ka Ma Maung to Mutraw in 11 trucks.

Friday, March 23

- 20:15 PM: Tatmadaw troops shot at KNLA troops at Baw Taw Per Kho.
- 20:26 PM: Fighting happened between Tatmadaw and KNLA troops, (location unconfirmed).
- 22:10 PM: Fighting happened between Tatmadaw and KNLA troops, (location unconfirmed).
- 22:15 PM: Fighting happened between KNLA and Tatmadaw troops at Htoo Klaw Loh Ni as Tatmadaw troops advanced into KNLA territory, beyond permitted zone.
- (Time unconfirmed): At Ta Ri Plaw, KNLA and Tatmadaw troops clashed as Tatmadaw troops advanced into KNLA territory, beyond the permitted zone.

Saturday, March 24

- 8:20 AM: Tatmadaw and KNLA troops clashed at Ler Mu Plaw, as Tatmadaw advanced into KNLA territory beyond the permitted zone.
- 9:00 AM: Tatmadaw and KNLA troops clashed at Baw Poe Kwa Ki, (Tatmadaw troops fired 31 60mm mortar shells).
- 19:45 PM: Tatmadaw and KNLA troops clashed at Ta Ri Plaw.

Sunday, March 25

- 20:22 PM: Tatmadaw and KNLA troops clash at Ta Ri Plaw as Tatmadaw troops advanced into KNLA territory, beyond the permitted zone.

Monday, March 26

- 11:00 AM: Tatmadaw and KNLA troops clash at Ta Ri Plaw as Tatmadaw advance into KNLA territory, beyond the permitted zone.

Tuesday, March 27

- Tatmadaw troops fired heavy weapons into villagers' fields in the Way Day, Ter May Kee area.

Words and Abbreviations: KNLA = Karen National Liberation Army (the armed wing of the Karen National Union); Tatmadaw (AKA) Myanmar Tatmadaw (Myanmar = Burman, Tatmadaw = Army); NCA = Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement; Plaw, is a Karen word meaning 'plain'; Kyoh is a Karen word meaning 'high hill'.

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