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Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

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Fighting against RCSS/SSA and human rights violations by Burma Army in Mong Paeng highlight insecurity in Eastern Shan State despite peace process

The recent fighting between the Burma Army and the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) on June 17, 2017, near Mong Pu Long, Mong Paeng township, eastern Shan State, is only the latest in a series of clashes between the two sides in this area during the first half of this year.

Although the RCSS/SSA signed the National Ceasefire Agreement and has actively taken part in the government's peace process, Burma Army troops have been instigating clashes with RCSS/SSA and patrolling through Mong Paeng, arbitrarily arresting and torturing civilians on suspicion of contact with Shan troops.

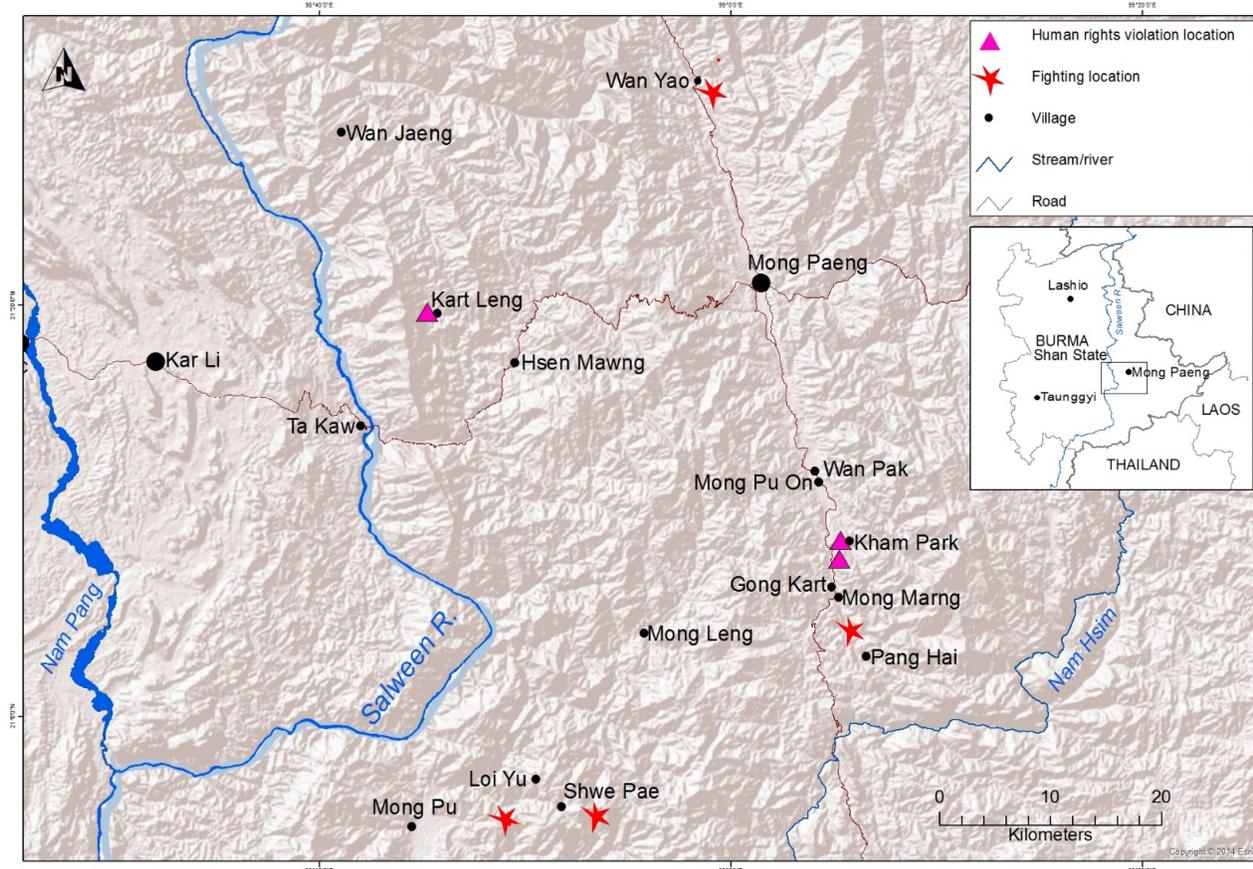
This update documents arbitrary detention, torture and looting of local villagers in Mong Paeng by Burma Army troops from Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) 277 and 527, and local pro-government militia, between February and April 2017.

In one incident – at Kart Leng village, 10 kilometers from the Salween River - on April 22, 2017, six Palaung villagers were interrogated, beaten and forced to dig “graves” and bury themselves up to their chest for one hour. Two other villagers, including the headman, were tied up and detained for three days.

The western edge of Mong Paeng township adjoins the Salween River, and lies in the projected flood zone of the giant Mong Ton dam, planned on the Salween by the Burmese government and Thai and Chinese investors. It is therefore very worrying that the Thai Energy Ministry has recently announced it will push ahead with the Mong Ton dam instead of the Hatgyi dam (on the Salween in Karen State), due to conflict between the Burmese government and “minorities” in the Karen area (Prachachat Thurakit, June 18, 2017) This gives the mistaken impression there is no such conflict in Shan State.

In fact, as this update shows, fighting and serious human rights violations by government troops are ongoing in areas adjacent to the Mong Ton dam and its flood zone. The Thai government is wise to review its dam-building plans on the Salween in Karen State due to the conflict, and is advised to do the same in Shan State.

Burma Army human rights violations and clashes with NCA signaory RCSS/SSA in Mong Paeng, E. Shan State, Feb-Jun 2017



Details of human rights violations documented by SHRF:

Two men arbitrarily detained, one beaten by Burma Army

On February 9, 2017 there was fighting between RCSS and the Burma Army near Na Lur and Pang Hai villages, between Mong Marng tract and Mong Pu On tract in Mong Paeng township. After the fighting, on the same day, about 30 Burma Army troops from Battalion 277, from Mong Ton, met two villagers from Wan Pak, Mong Pu On tract, who were riding a motorbike on their way back from buying horses from Mong Marng. The Burma Army troops stopped them, then arrested and detained them at their base at Wan Gong Kart in Mong Marng tract.

The two victims were:

1. Sai Hsu, aged 39, son of Lung Korn and Pa Kut
2. Sai Wanna, aged 30, son of Lung Marn Ma and Pa Marn Aung. He was beaten by the Burma Army troops with the butt of a gun until his head bled. He was not given any medical treatment

On February 12, Sai Wanna's parents and relatives went to the Burma Army base at Mong Marng. Sai Wanna's mother passed out when she saw his injuries. The Burma Army released Sai Wanna on that day. After two days, Sai Hsu was also released.

The two victims were badly traumatized, and dared not meet or speak to anyone after the incident.

Looting of villagers' cash and property by Burma Army

On 19 March, 2017, about 40 troops from Burma Army LIB 527 based at Mong Hsat under Military Operation Command (MOC) 14 at Mong Hsat and from the Mong Marng-based Lahu militia, drove three cars to Kharm Park village, Mong Pu On tract, Mong Paeng township, from the direction of Mong Marng.

On March 20, 2017, soldiers from this group patrolled around Kham Park village and looted the property of several villagers from their homes. The following villagers lost their property:

1. Lung Inn Hseng, aged 39, and Pa Yawn, aged 39, lost a mobile phone, a knife costing 7,500 kyats (USD 5) and 300,000 kyats (USD 220) in cash.
2. Lung Ma Ha, aged 47, and Pa Aung, aged 52, lost 5 bags of rice costing 60,000 kyats (USD 44), a solar cell costing 50,000 kyats (USD 36), a battery costing 28,000 kyats (USD 20), a knife costing 15,000 kyats (USD 10), and a hen worth 7,000 kyats (USD 5).

Six Palaung villagers beaten, half-buried in "graves"; headman and one villager tied up and detained on suspicion of aiding Shan soldiers

On 22 April, 2017, about 20 troops from Burma Army Battalion 247, tortured six villagers, and detained two others, including the headman, from the Palaung village of Kart Leng, Hsen Mawng tract, Mong Paeng township.

At noon on that day, the Burma Army troops arrived at Kart Leng village, and summoned villagers from each household to gather at Kart Leng temple. (Kart Leng has about 30 households)



Kart Leng temple

When the troops summoned the villagers to the temple, they interrogated them one by one about Shan soldiers. Some of the villagers did not really understand the Burmese language and could not answer properly. Six villagers were beaten and each ordered to dig a hole of 1.5 meters long and one foot deep, the size of a grave, in a corn farm just behind the temple. Then they were forced to lie in the pit and cover themselves with earth up to their chest for one hour. After that, they were made to get out of the pit, and were told: "You are on the death list."

One of the villagers who was buried ("Paw Brai" aged 30) was hit by about 5-6 Burmese soldiers when he was being questioned. He was hit in the forehead, his left eye and his nose, causing his eye to become bruised and his nose to bleed.

After this incident, Paw Brai did not dare stay in the village, and went to stay with his mother at Nam Jang Kart Ler, between Mong Nai and Namzarng townships, a day's journey away. For a week, he did not eat or drink anything; his body was just shaking. His mother then had to hold a ceremony to call back his "spirit" (according to local belief), and he recovered. There was no support from the Burma Army.

When Paw Brai was being questioned at the temple, he was shown a picture by the Burma Army of another villager, Sai Jean Sam, assistant to the headman. They asked him whether this was a Shan soldier. Since he could not understand Burmese properly, he just said yes. So they arrested Sai Jean Sam on suspicion of contacting the Shan soldiers.



Paw Brai's house

They arrested Sai Jean Sam together with the headman, Lung Sarm Shwe. Their hands were tied behind their back, and they were kept behind the monastery for three days. They were only released after a villager telephoned to one

of Lung Sarm Shwe's relatives in Namzarng, who could understand Burmese. He was able to explain to the soldiers that the two men were not RCSS members.

Details of the two men who were detained are as follows:

1. The headman, Lung Sarm Shwe, aged 40 years, son of Baw Min and Mae Min of Wan Kart Leng. He was accused of calling the Shan troops to come and set up their base outside the village.
2. Sai Jean Sam, aged 30, son of Lung Jean Sam and Ba Jean Sam of Wan Kart Leng. He was accused of being affiliated with Shan soldiers.

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