KHRG Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Burma Army arbitrary arrests and extortion, domestic violence, drug issues, education difficulties, and healthcare challenges in Maw Sa Ko Township (January 2025 to May 2026)


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These photos were taken by a KHRG researcher in May 2026, in Vl--- village, Kyet Tu Yway Thaung village tract, Maw Sa Ko (Paung) Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District. On 27 May 2026, at 9:20 am, Karen National Union (KNU) security forces arrested Ko Ac--- for using and selling WY methamphetamine, commonly known as yaba. The photos show WY methamphetamine packets and pills seized by the KNU security forces during the arrest of Ko Ac---. *[Photos: KHRG]*

Burma Army arbitrarily arrested villagers and demanded their money

From January 2025 to April 2026, the Burma Army[2] arbitrarily arrested villagers in Maw Sa Ko (Paung) Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District. From February to April 2026, the Burma Army set up checkpoints and stopped villagers during their travels both by motorbike and car. They arrested villagers who were riding two people per motorbike and demanded money from them. The amount they demanded was often very high, and they threatened villagers that if villagers could not pay the amount of money that [the Burma Army] demanded, they [villagers] would be arrested and forcibly recruited into military service. In some villages, the soldiers also demanded money from villagers who were riding on a motorbike alone. As a result, many villagers faced difficulties carrying out their daily work and normal activities.

On 31 January 2025, in the evening, 13-year-old Saw[3] C---, son of Naw[4] Q--- and Saw J---, and 17-year-old Maung[5] R---, son of Ma[6] V--- and U[7] Y---, from Zy--- village, Aye Waing village tract,[8] Maw Sa Ko Township, went out to buy flip-flops after work. On a road in Zy--- village, they encountered militia soldiers under the control of the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC).[9] The militia soldiers arrested them, accusing them of riding two people per motorbike. Maung R--- and Saw C--- said that they did not know where they were taken by the militia soldiers after being arrested. They only knew that they were taken to Thaton Town, Doo Tha Htoo District. When they arrived in Thaton Town, the militia soldiers detained Maung R--- in the stocks and interrogated him. The militia soldiers intended to forcibly recruit Saw C--- and Maung R--- into the military, but they were underage. Therefore, the militia soldiers put the two teenage boys in the stocks for one night. The next morning, their parents searched for them. Afterwards, the parents, village head, and village elders went to Thaton Town. On 1 February 2025, the two teenage boys were interrogated again by the militia soldiers, 2,500,000 kyats (1,190.48 USD)[10] each were demanded [by the militia soldiers] for their release, and [after the parents paid,] they then returned home with their parents.

On 2 June 2025, 26-year-old Saw N--- from Rk--- village, Kyet Tu Yway Thaung village tract, Maw Saw Ko Township, and one of his friends from Zd--- village, Kyet Tu Yway Thaung village tract, drove a dump truck [to go collect a load of gravel for construction], and when he arrived at Pn--- village, Thel Aay village tract, Maw Saw Ko Township, he was stopped by Burma Army soldiers and police in front of a police station [located in Pn--- village]. When he was interrogated, it was found that while he had a driver's license, the car he drove was not registered. So, he was arrested. He contacted the village head and asked for help [to be released]. Then, the village head talked to the Burma Army soldiers and police, who demanded 2,000,000 kyats (952.38 USD) [for his release]. [When he agreed to pay,] he was released.

The victim, Saw N---, stated: *"When we went, at the place that they live, they were staying two or three. They did not bother us. After we picked up stones in Lt--- [village, Thel Aay village tract] and on our way back, they stopped the car and they asked: 'Does the car have registration?' We answered: 'It doesn't.' Then they continued: 'Do you have a driver's license?' We answered: 'We have it.' They forced us to park the truck beside [the road]. We had to get out of the truck. After we got out, we pleaded with them and had a conversation [with them], but they did not release us. They said that they would send [us] to the police office. We asked for help from the village head, and the village head came. The village head had a conversation with the Burma Army soldiers and police who arrested us. We waited for a while, then they let us drive back first. Later, [they chased and stopped us and] they told us we had to pay money to them. They asked us for over 3,000,000 kyats (1,428.57 USD) [each]. However, we negotiated [with them], and they reduced it to 2,000,000 kyats (952.38 USD) [each]. There were two people who were arrested: me and my friend, who lives in Zd--- village. Then, we drove back to the car and each of us paid them 2,000,000 kyats (952.38 USD) [4,000,000 kyats (1,904.76 USD) in total]. Afterward, they told us that if we had to pick up stones, we must inform them first, then we can go." He continued: "We said to them that we dared not to go anymore. This time, we had to pay 2,000,000 kyats (952.38 USD), and [in the future] we are afraid that they will arrest us again. We can't do anything anymore. Even though they told us like that, we answered them that we dare not to go anymore. Then they told us, nowadays they arrested us due to the law."*

On 24 November 2025, at 4 pm, after working on their plantation, 18-year-old Saw T---, son of Saw H--- and Daw[11] G---, and 18-year-old Saw Z---, son of U D---- and Daw M---, both from Jn--- village, Sakhangyi village tract, Maw Sa Ko Township, went to repair their phone's charger port because it was broken. On the way, at [the side of] a road, two people in plain clothes came out, and forced them to stop their motorbike. Then, the two people seized their [Saw T--- and Saw Z---'s] motorbike key and arrested them arbitrarily. Afterward they [Saw T--- and Saw Z---] were taken in a car and detained. They [Saw T--- and Saw Z----] said that after they were arrested, they were transported place to place and were threatened that they would be recruited into the military. Later, when they were asked their ages, they lied that they were 17 years old. They [the Burma Army] asked their parents' names, and they [Saw T--- and Saw Z---] were detained with handcuffs [at an unspecified location in Thaton Town]. On 25 November 2025, Saw T--- and Saw Z--- could contact their parents by phone, so they spoke on the phone. On 26 November 2025, the parents of the two individuals approached the village elders, including the village head, to [ask the elders to] negotiate for their release following their arrest [by the Burma Army]. On 26 November 2025, at 8 am, they were brought back home [by their parents] after being released. According to their parents, [the Burma Army] demanded 2,500,000 kyats (1,190.48 USD) for each of the two individuals in exchange for their release, amounting to 5,000,000 kyats (2,390.95 USD) in total [which the villagers paid]. The village head said that the individuals who arrested and took them [Saw T--- and Saw Z---] away were members of Burma Army forces under the control of the SAC [State Administration Council].

In 2025, date unknown, two villagers, 33-year-old Saw B---, from Tt--- village, Zakhangyi village tract, Maw Sa Ko Township, and 27-year-old Saw A---, from Rk--- village, Kyet Tu Yway Thaung village tract, were harvesting paddy on their farms, located near a tollgate by Ta Tan Pyu Bridge. After work, they drove home.

On their way back home, they were stopped and arrested by Burma Army soldiers under the SSPC near a tollgate on the Yangon-Mawlamyine Road, after passing Ta Tan Pyu Bridge. They [Saw B--- and Saw A---] were handcuffed and taken to Thaton Town Police Station, where they were detained overnight. In the following days, their family members and village heads went to Thaton Town to secure their release. [The Burma Army] demanded 2,000,000 kyats (952.38 USD) each for their release. Their car was confiscated and was not returned [when their families paid and they were released].

Domestic violence harmed women in Maw Sa Ko Township

On 4 April 2026, a 40-year-old named Daw E--- and her children, from Zn--- village, Thel Aein San Pya village tract, Maw Sa Ko Township, faced domestic violence committed by her 45-year-old husband named Ko[12] I---, who had an alcohol addiction. On that day, after the husband of Daw E--- came back from work, he went to drink alcohol, giving the reason that he was tired from work. After he got drunk, he came home and picked a fight with his wife. He hit and punched his wife and children. Therefore, his wife and children dared not stay at home and had to hide and sleep in other places. His children were affected mentally for being abused by the drunk father, fearing further abuse from him.

Daw E--- stated: *"In my children's minds, they only thought about when their father would come home, when they would be beaten and punched, how would he pick a fight with their mother [me] again, and whether their father was going to beat their mother [me] again. The children always requested to me not to sleep in the house because they were afraid that their father would come home drunk and abuse them, so they requested to me to go and sleep overnight at other villagers' houses with them."*

Sometimes when their father drank too much alcohol and became very drunk, he fell asleep. But if he did not fall asleep, he beat, punched, and cursed his wife and children. Sometimes, he shot his wife and children with a wooden slingshot from a distance before he reached the home. He started cursing all along the way from the shop where he drank alcohol to his house. He wasted the money that he had. According to Daw E---, their children were teenagers already, and it was only the youngest son that was not a teenager yet. The children felt embarrassed by the behaviour of their father. Because the husband wasted money like that, the family members faced food challenges for not having sufficient food for their daily meals. Their children requested the mother to divorce their father because they could no longer bear the abuse their father conducted. [As of September 2026: The case was solved locally, rather than through a formal justice system. The couple divorced, and the husband went back to Myingyan Town, Mandalay Region, his place of origin.]

On 9 April 2026, at 11 am, 27-year-old Ko L---, son of the Daw K---, from Za--- village, Thel Aay village tract, committed domestic violence against his ill mother named Daw K--- and [when he] came back home, [he also] threatened his mother and scolded her. He beat and cursed his mother. He reportedly verbally abused his mother, telling her that she was too old and asking why she had not died yet. He also reportedly said that she was a burden to the family, that she was useless because she could not earn an income, and that she only ate and slept. He sometimes punched his mother. He also used to beat his wife named Ma O--- and curse her [committed domestic violence against her], who had a newborn baby. He used to commit domestic violence against the family and [sometimes] tried to beat the baby in the cradle. It usually happened when he was

drunk. According to his wife, they always experienced this type of violence whenever her husband was drunk, and things never happened if he was not drunk. At first, she thought she would not report it to anyone, as it was a family issue, and it would be embarrassing if outsiders knew. But the husband did not improve his behaviour, and he also beat their baby, who knew nothing about the world yet. So, on the same day in the evening, his wife reported him to village head. The village head came to arrest him and punished him by detaining him for six months. After that [in October 2026], he was released to return home. The village head told him [Ko L---] that he [the village head] would keep an eye on him, and if he committed those violations again, he [the village head] would hand him to the local police force [Karen National Police Force (KNPF) [13]].

On 17 May 2026, at around 12:30 pm, 32-year-old Ma Ab---, from Zb--- village, Aa Nan Pin village tract, Maw Sa Ko Township, suffered domestic violence committed by her husband [name unknown]. Her husband usually drank alcohol and picked fights with her but never abused her physically before. On 17 May 2026, at around 12:30 pm, her husband returned from work and sharpened his machete under their stilted house. She asked her husband to remove three fence posts. Then her husband complained to her and refused to do it. In addition, her husband picked a fight with her by accusing her that she had a paramour. On that day, her husband was a little drunk, so they argued for a while. Then, Ma Ab---'s older sister phoned her and asked if her brother-in-law went to work or not. Ma Ab--- responded to her older sister that 'the worker' did not go to work. Then, her [Ma Ab---'s] husband started arguing again. Ma Ab--- recounted: *"He said: 'How dare you call me a worker? Aren't you my wife? Am I not your husband? Everybody knows that I am your husband.' I responded to him: 'Am I that wrong for saying the word 'Worker'? We do not need to argue on this. I just said, 'Aa ma yay [Sister], the worker doesn't go to work, he is at home.' Then, my husband came up in the house and slapped my face and said: 'Shut your mouth! I will kill both you and your child,' while I was sitting in the house and peeling dog fruit [djenkol bean] shells."* Then the husband tried to kill her by strangling her. He frequently used bad words and cursed his wife and child.

Ma Ab--- stated: *"I was tortured the third time [that he committed domestic violence]. He beat me, strangled me, and held a machete [like he was going] to hack me to death. It was the first time that he assaulted me physically [beat me]. He tried to strangle me many times before. [...] I told him, 'You have no right to beat me, you cannot beat me. [If you beat me,] I will report it to village head and village elders.' Then he told me, 'Go ahead and report me wherever you want to report it. No one can beat me.' Then I told him, 'There is absolutely no reason why you couldn't be beaten by anyone.'"* She then went out from her house to the village head's house and reported the case. The village head processed the case and detained him [Ma Ab---'s husband]. [As of October 2026: The case was solved within the village, with the help of the village head, rather than through a formal justice system. The couple divorced, and the husband went back to his parents' house in another village. KHRG does not have the exact address of the village to which he returned.]

Maw Sa Ko Township security force arrested a villager for using and dealing WY amphetamine

In Maw Sa Ko Township, during the spawning season, villagers were not allowed to catch fish from the rivers and streams. So, Karen National Union (KNU)[14] township security forces patrolled around and hung posters with the sign "Do not catch fish" beside rivers and streams. On 27 May 2026, at 9:20 am, [the township

security forces] were patrolling and checking along rivers and streams. During their patrolling, they found 53-year-old Ko Ac---, son of U W--- and Daw Aa---, beside the Jv--- River in Vl--- village, Kyet Tu Yway Thaung village tract, who acted strangely, causing the security forces to be suspicious. So, they interrogated him. During the interrogation, the township security forces found WY amphetamine, or yaba, in Ko Ac---'s basket. Therefore, the authorities [security forces] arrested Ko Ac--- and handed him over to township authorities. They found 19 packs of yaba in total. Then they counted the pills in those 19 packs of amphetamine (yaba) and they found 3,800 pills in total. The township authorities responded that they would take action on Ko Ac---'s drug case according to their policy. [Ko Ac--- was reportedly charged under the KNU justice system and received a jail sentence, but it is unknown to KHRG the length or details of the sentence.]

Mixed control creates challenge for establishment of KECD school in Maw Sa Ko Township

As there were no KECD [Karen Education and Culture Department][15] schools in Maw Sa Ko Township, efforts were underway to collect information on local education. So, I [a KHRG researcher] tried my best to document the information of education in Maw Sa Ko Township by classifying it into three groups of villages in the township: 1) villages inhabited exclusively by Karen communities; 2) villages inhabited exclusively by other ethnic communities including Bamar, Mon, and Pa-O; and 3) villages where different ethnic communities live together. So, the information in this report was collected and documented according to these three categories.

In particular, in the education sector, they [the KECD] had started collecting and recording the current number of primary, middle, and high schools, as well as the lists of villages and village tracts where these schools are located. The basic education schools in Maw Sa Ko Township are:

1. 11 [main] high schools;
2. 12 branch high schools [affiliated with the main schools];
3. six [main] middle schools;
4. eight branch middle schools;
5. 99 [main] primary schools; and
6. 23 branch primary schools.

Due to the current situation [of mixed control], there were not conditions for implementing KECD schools in Maw Sa Ko Township. Therefore, in order to provide the resources needed to implement KECD schools [share KECD curriculum], they [the KECD] supported a total of 32 students from Maw Sa Ko Township to study at Zc--- KECD high school, [located] in [Zc--- village, T'Rweh Hkee (Kyet Kant Chaung) village tract,] Thaton Township, Doo Tha Htoo District.

Maw Sa Ko Township has been under the control of the SAC [State Administration Council;[16] and prior to the SAC, the Burma government] for more than 50 years, so KECD schools have not yet been able to open there. Karen language and literature are taught very little in government schools. As a result, many Karen people have limited knowledge of the formal Karen language and have low literacy in Karen. After the SAC seized power in the 2021 [military coup[17]], villagers in Maw Sa Ko Township did not accept the coup and started coming to trust in and rely on the KNU. KECD was able to provide education services to 32 students

from Maw Sa Ko Township who could be reached and support them to attend Zc--- KECD school in Thaton Township.

There were currently [as of the end of the reporting period] no KECD teachers in Maw Sa Ko Township. Although there was a desire to establish KECD schools, KECD schools could not yet be opened because the SAC's administrative and security forces were present and operating in the area. Students also had limited interest in travelling to other townships or distant areas to attend KECD schools.

Burma Army checkpoint caused risk to KDHW health workers

Maw Sa Ko Township is an infiltration zone [mixed-control area], so local villagers in the area were concerned about the risks posed by the SAC. For medical treatment, villagers mainly went to hospitals and clinics run by the Burma Army. After villagers began to learn about the KNU [Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW)[18]] health workers [in 2026, as a result of expanding KDHW healthcare campaigns and by word of mouth amongst villagers from other townships], some villagers also started receiving medical treatment from KNU [KDHW] health workers. However, KNU [KDHW] health workers also faced difficulties with transportation and travel [because of the Burma Army checkpoints on the way], which limited their ability to provide healthcare services regularly in the area.

Further background reading on the human rights situation in Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District in Southeast Burma/Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Photo Set: Burma Army human rights violations in Southeast Burma (January to June 2026)", July 2026.
- "Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Burma Army shelling killed a five-year-old, injured 12 villagers, including two children, and caused destruction in Kyeh Htoh Township (August 2026)", October 2026.
- "Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Experiences and testimonies of two civilians who were forcibly recruited by the Burma Army (June 2026)", August 2026.