

# Karen Villagers Protest Expanding Burma Army Offensives in Mutraw (Hpapun) District

## **Editorial Notes:**

Since March 4, 2018, the Burma Army has deployed more than 1,000 additional troops into Luthaw Township, northern Mutraw (Hpapun) District. The Burma Army is strategically positioning troops to construct a military road between Hto Moh Pleh Meh and Hsa Law Joh military camps (see attached map). The Burma Army's most recent provocation has resulted in numerous armed clashes with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). On March 16, the Karen National Union issued a statement against the Burma Army's actions, which violate the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

15 villages directly affected by the Burma Army's advances: Htee Hsee Kee, Htee Bway Kee, Taw Koh Mu Der, Ter May Kee, Thay Thoo Kee, Kyaw Aye Kee, Ghee Thoo Kee, Htee Kheh Kee, Blaw Koh, Hee Gho Lo Der, Haw Ther Kee, Saw Mu Plaw, Ler Mu Plaw, Baw Nah Der, and Sho Ber Koh.

The fertile plains of Ler Mu Plaw comprise over 900 acres of irrigated land capable of feeding over 4,000 people; if the new military road is built, much of this plain might once again be abandoned by villagers who are too afraid to live near soldiers who have attacked and abused them for decades.

Military roads in this part of Karen State are a source of great fear for local people, since they facilitate increased movement of Burma Army troops and transport of heavy weapons into Karen areas. Local people are often in danger of getting shot by Burma Army soldiers near these roads.

Two forest rangers from the Kheshorter Community Forest have been killed near these roads since 2012. Saw Maw Kay was shot and killed by Burma Army soldiers at 10 AM Feb 22, 2015, while he was patrolling the area to protect villagers while they were clearing their upland rotational farms.

Since the bilateral ceasefire was signed between the Karen National Union and Burma Army in 2012, KNU authorities have requested withdrawal of 17 Burma Army camps in Mutraw District to facilitate return of displaced villagers to their ancestral lands. Instead, between 2012 and 2015, the military established 16 new bases in Mutraw, bringing the total from 65 to 81, while reinforcing existing installations.

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which was signed by the KNU in 2015, requires that both parties honor existing territories while peace negotiations continue, and it forbids acts of aggression, expansion of military infrastructure, and troop reinforcements in ceasefire areas.

The Salween Peace Park is a community-based initiative that reflects the core aspirations of the Karen people: 1) peace and self-determination; 2) environmental integrity, and 3) cultural survival. A video on the Salween Peace Park can be found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWyDBz2HaJo&t=350s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWyDBz2HaJo&t=350s)