

# Airstrikes in Kayah state

Damage to an IDP camp, school, religious site and homes

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 12 SEPTEMBER 2023

## Key Event Details

- **Date, time and location of Incidents:**

- Airstrikes — 22 June 2023: Li Khu Pa Yar village (လီခူပရား), Hpruso Township (ဖရူဆို), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်), [19.288804, 96.968735].
- K-8 plane crash — 30 June 2023: Ywar Thit sub-township (ရွာသစ်), Bawlakhe (ဘော်လခဲ), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်), [19.135286, 97.520772].
- Airstrikes — 9 July 2023: Hpasawng township (ဖားဆောင်းမြို့), Kayah<sup>1</sup> state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်), [18.833424, 97.323086].
- Airstrikes — 12 July 2023: Daw Noe Ku Internally Displaced Persons Camp (IDP) (ဒေါ်နိုးကူး စစ်ရှောင်စခန်း) Shadaw township (ရှားတောမြို့), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်), [19.32696180, 97.8187087].
- Airstrikes — 12 July 2023: Hpasawng township (ဖားဆောင်းမြို့), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်), [18.833068, 97.324233].
- Airstrikes — 12 July 2023: Kyauk Su village (ကျောက်စု), Mese township (မယ်စွဲမြို့), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်), [18.769276, 97.389804].
- Clashes and airstrikes — 18 July 2023: Yar Do village (ယာဒို), Thantaunggyi township (သံတောင်ကြီး), Kayin State (ကရင် ပြည်နယ်), [19.358822, 96.802461].
- Airstrikes — 26 July 2023: Kyauk Su village middle school, Mese township (မယ်စွဲမြို့), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်), [18.769715, 97.3873880].

- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**

- Myanmar Air Force (MAF)
- Myanmar military
- State Administrative Council (SAC)
- People's Defence Forces (PDF)

<sup>1</sup> The state is officially called Kayah, however the inhabitants often refer to the state as Karenni state.

## Summary

After the February 2021 coup d'état, Kayah state has been the site of clashes between the Myanmar military and People's Defence Forces (PDF). The Myanmar military has struggled to exert and maintain control on the ground, and has taken to using airstrikes on areas of resistance. This has resulted in damage to not only PDF camps, but also IDP camps and residential areas. During July 2023, multiple Myanmar Air Force (MAF) airstrikes were reported in Kayah state. Myanmar Witness has investigated these events and geolocated user-generated content (UGC) purporting to show the different incidents.

According to claims made in [local media](#) reports, the Myanmar military has conducted air and ground offensives to regain control of Mase town (မယ်တဲ) in Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ) on the Thai-Myanmar border, as well as offensives in Hpasawng township, which sits on the banks of the Salwin River (သံလွင်မြစ်). Resistance groups [reported](#) daily battles, which have led to more than 3,500 people fleeing the area and crossing the border into Thailand, where Thailand's Mae Hong Son Inspection Department has been sheltering them.

Myanmar Witness has identified UGC associated with a number of claimed airstrikes in Kayah state in late June and July 2023. On 22 June, the MAF [reportedly](#) carried out three airstrikes on Li Khu Pa Yar village, Hpruso Township, damaging four homes and a school and leaving a middle-aged man with significant injuries. On 30 June, a MAF [K-8 light attack aircraft](#) reportedly crashed in Ywar Thit sub-township, Bawlakhe. Accounts vary over whether the plane crashed due to bad weather or whether Karenni/Kayah PDF shot down the plane. However, this places a MAF plane which has the capacity to carry out airstrikes in the vicinity during the timeframe when airstrikes were reported.

On 9 July, it was [reported](#) that the MAF carried out airstrikes in Hpasawng township (video no longer available online, however it was previously archived by Myanmar Witness). Myanmar Witness captured a still image from a video of the airstrike and used peakvisor to verify the location. Further airstrikes were reported in Kyauk Pe Nyo village, Hpasawng township, on 12 July. Myanmar Witness geolocated footage showing buildings that were allegedly damaged in the strikes. This was done by stitching together a panorama from video footage uploaded to social media and cross-referencing it with satellite imagery.

Two other airstrikes were also reported on the same day. At around 0102 local time on 12 July 2023, it is [reported](#) that the MAF bombed an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp on the Kayah/Karenni-Thai border, killing a 10-year-old child and seriously injuring others. The airstrike also allegedly damaged houses which were sheltering IDPs who had already fled conflict elsewhere in the country. Myanmar Witness geolocated UGC showing the camp before and after the alleged airstrike.

Additionally, an 11-year-old child and an IDP were [reportedly](#) killed in an airstrike in Kyauk Su village, Mese township, also on 12 July 2023. Although Myanmar Witness could not

independently confirm the number of deaths, it was possible to geolocate the site of the airstrike using UGC. According to a Facebook user, a middle school in the same village, Kyauk Su, was also bombed on 26 July 2023 (source redacted due to privacy concerns). Although Myanmar Witness could not confirm the exact date, the location was verified.

Finally, following a ground battle on 18 July 2023 near Yar Do village, Thantaunggyi township, the MAF allegedly carried out an airstrike. Myanmar Witness have analysed a [video](#) purporting to show the event and was able to verify the location of the airstrike.

While efforts have been taken to collect as much information as possible on airstrikes in Kayah state over this time period, a number of other airstrikes reportedly took place in the region during this timeframe which Myanmar Witness were unable to verify or partially verify.

## Myanmar Witness has been able to verify:

- Myanmar Witness geolocated imagery posted on Facebook showing extensive destruction to structures in Li Khu Pa Yar village (လီခူပရား), Hpruso township (ဖရှုဆို), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်)
- Myanmar Witness geolocated drone footage which purports to show the aftermath of a K-8 plane crash Ywar Thit sub-township (ရှုသစ်), Bawlakhe (ဘော်လခဲ), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်)
- Myanmar Witness geolocated footage showing buildings that were allegedly damaged in the strikes in Hpasawng township (ဖားဆောင်းမြို့).
- Myanmar Witness geolocated UGC showing the Daw Noe Ku IDP Camp (ဒေါ်နို့ကူးစစ်ရှောင်စခန်း) before and after the alleged airstrike and verified damage to structures there which is consistent with airstrike damage.
- Myanmar Witness geolocated UGC showing damage consistent with airstrikes in Kyauk Su village (ကျောက်စု) Mese township (မယ်စွဲမြို့), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ ပြည်နယ်)
- Myanmar Witness geolocated video footage showing airstrikes in Yar Do village, Thantaunggyi township (သံတောင်ကြီး), Kayin State (ကရင် ပြည်နယ်).

## Clashes prior to the airstrikes

It is [reported](#) that three SAC camps and the Mese police station in Mese township (မယ်စွဲမြို့), Kayah state (ကယား/ကရင်နီ), were attacked simultaneously by local PDF on 13 June 2023,

between 0500 and 1000 local time. According to the Karenni Military Central Information Organisation (KMIC), the three camps included Taung Hla (တောင်လှ) camp near Taung Hla village (တောင်လှရွာ), Meltangwe camp (မယ်လန္ဒယ်) and the Myanmar-Thailand border post Number 14 on the east bank of the Salwin River (သံလွင်မြစ်) in Mese Township. At present, Myanmar Witness has not geolocated the camps.

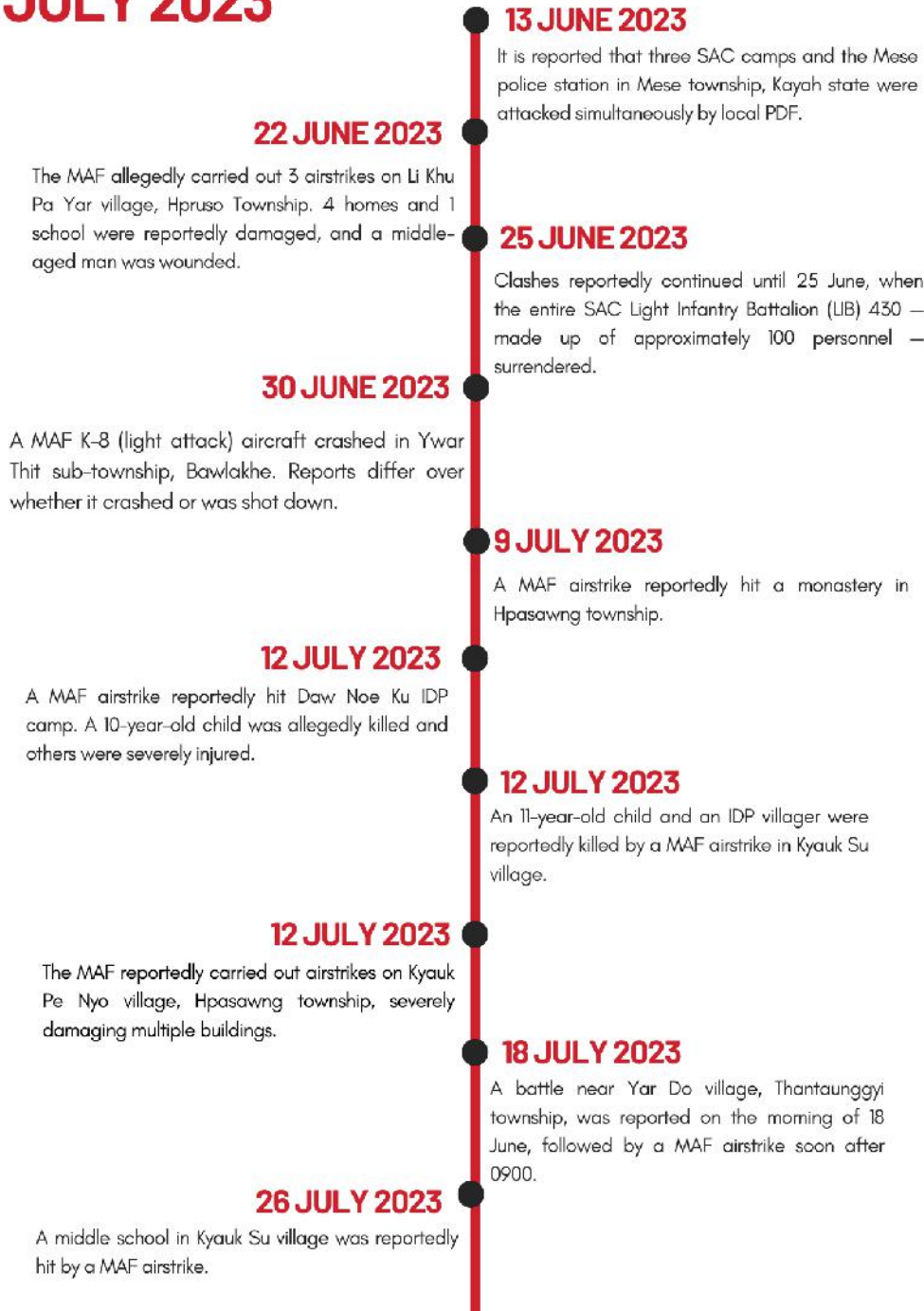
Approximately 40 automatic rifles were recovered from the three SAC camps, according to a [KMIC spokesperson](#) responsible for publishing the Karenni Army's (KA) military news. Additionally, the township police chief was reportedly killed at the Mese police station during the clashes.

Clashes reportedly continued until the 25 June, when according to [multiple sources](#), the entire SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 430 — made up of approximately 100 personnel, [including](#) Lieutenant Colonel Zana Aung and Deputy Battalion Commander Kyaw Thu Soe — surrendered to the Karenni joint forces from Mese Byuha Gone Military Camp no. 13. However, the surrender was contested by [SAC sources](#).

The area has been the site of previous conflict; other Light Infantry Divisions (LIDs) and LIBs have operated in Kayah state. For example, following the coup, the LID 66 and its 10 subordinate battalions [reportedly](#) moved to west Bago (ပဲခူး), Thegon Township (သဲကုန်းမြို့), Kayah state. In September 2021, intense fighting between Karenni resistance forces and LID 66 [reportedly](#) led to heavy casualties. The struggle for control of Kayah state has continued since then, with the SAC increasing the use of air attacks in recent months. Loikaw, Demoso, Hpasawng, Mese, and Bawlakhe townships have come under fire and IDPs on the Kayah state/Thailand border have also been put at risk from airstrikes.

## Timeline of events

### INCIDENTS IN KAYAH JULY 2023



## Location of incidents

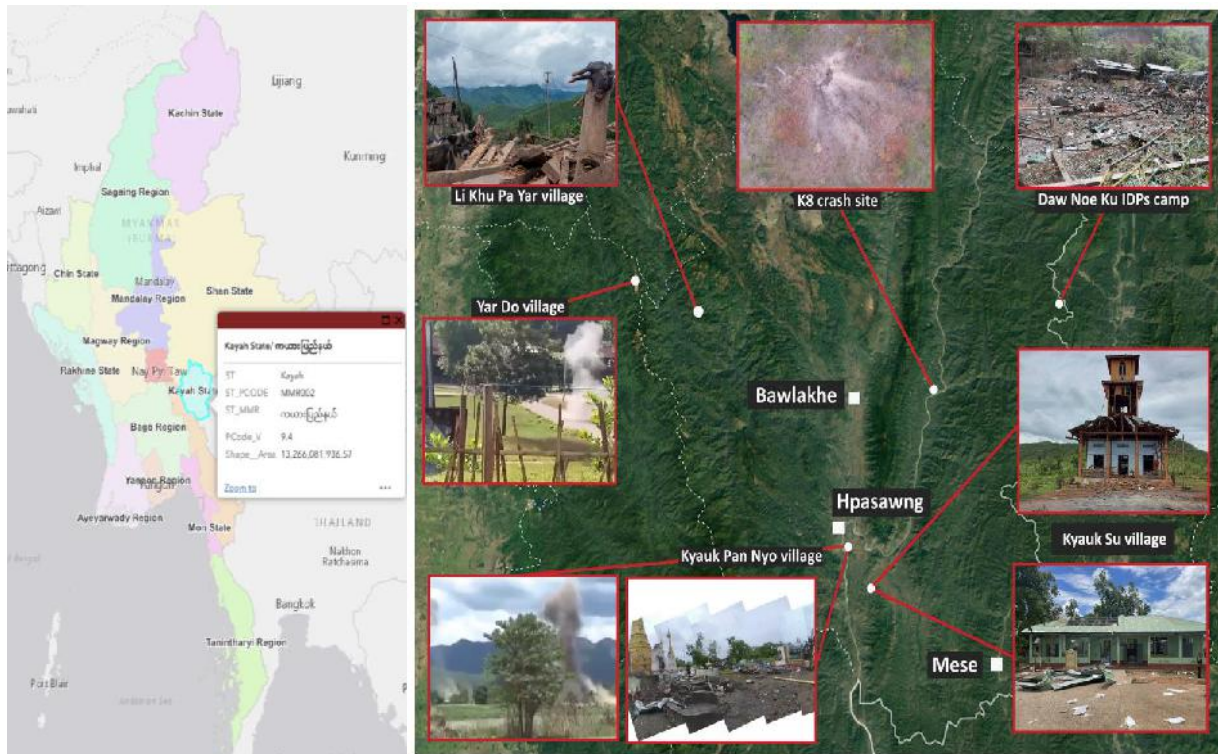


Figure 1: Location map of airstrikes and plane crash areas.

## The investigation walkthrough

### Airstrikes in Hpruso Township

On 22 June 2023, at 0030, the MAF [reportedly](#) carried out three airstrikes on Li Khu Pa Yar village (လီခူပာယား), Hpruso Township. Four homes and a school were allegedly damaged by the airstrikes, and a middle-aged man suffered significant injuries to his chest. The village houses a population of roughly 200 people, within 40 houses and has poor transportation links. According to the Hpruso PDF, there was no fighting going on in the immediate area when the MAF bombed the village and its surroundings.

Myanmar Witness geolocated imagery posted on Karenni's Voice's [facebook page](#), which shows extensive destruction to structures in the village [19.288804, 96.968735].

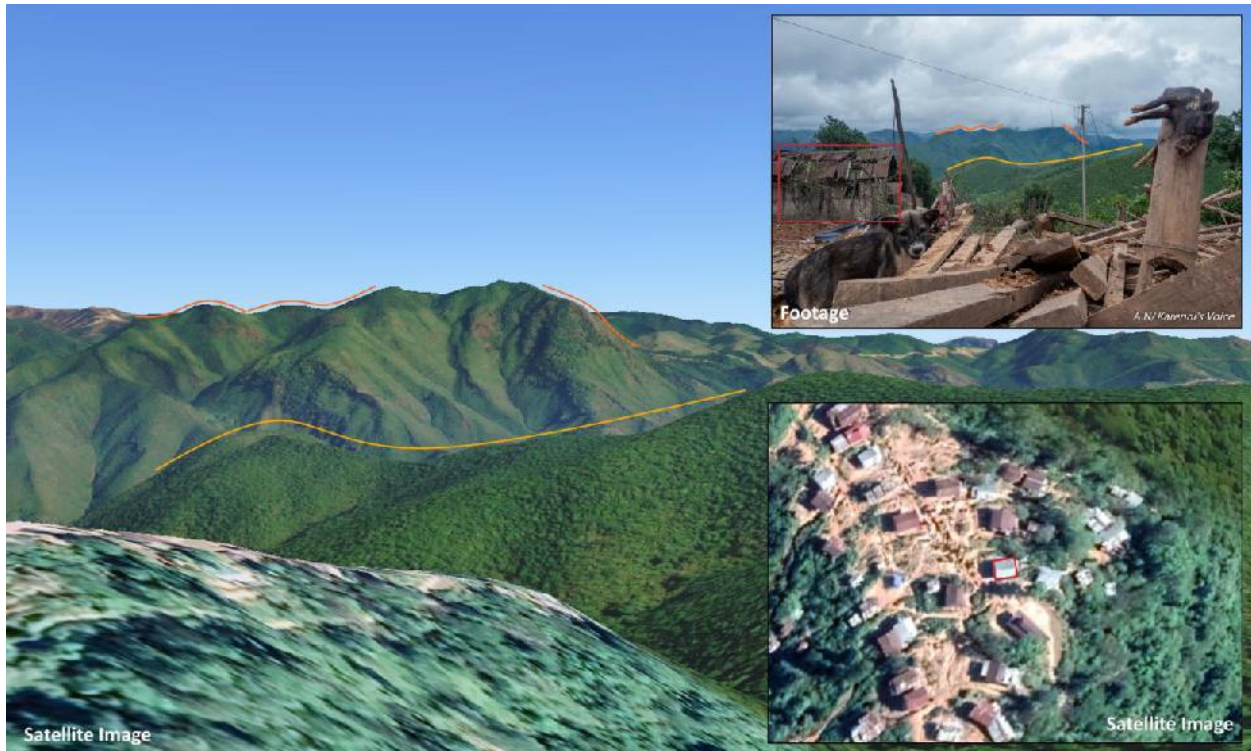


Figure 2: Geolocation of destruction to Lu Khu Pa Yar village on 22 June (source: [Karenni's Voice](#)).

## K-8 light attack aircraft crash

On 30 June 2023, a MAF [K-8 light attack aircraft](#) reportedly crashed in Ywar Thit sub-township, Bawlakhe (tail number [3935](#)). According to [Myanmar Now](#), pro-SAC media channels claimed that the K-8 crashed because of bad weather and that the two pilots were still missing. However, Karenni/Kayah PDF claimed they shot down the plane. For example, the former SAC Border Guard Forces, Ka-La-La-Ta (ကရင်နီပြည်လူမျိုး ပေါင်းစုံပြည် သူ့လွတ် မြောက် ရေးတပ်ဦး - ကလလတ) — a group which recently defected and joined the Karenni/Kayah resistance forces — claimed that they had fired weapons at the aircraft while it was flying at low altitude.

The news of a K-8 crashing went viral on social media and on 5 July 2023, Ka-La-La-Ta facebook page [posted](#) drone footage purporting to show the crash site. According to the [Khit Thit](#), Ka-La-La-Ta and local PDF repeatedly tried to take pictures using drones of the plane wreckage, located in the forest in the eastern part of Ywar Thit village; however, it was difficult to get a clear view and the site was heavily guarded by the SAC. As a result, drone footage was only possible from a distance (see figure 3 below). While markings on the ground suggest a crash could have taken place here, there is no visible sign of debris from the plane. [Reports](#) suggest that SAC personnel, who arrived quickly at the scene, cleared away all debris of the plane.

The two pilots — Captain Thaw Zin and Captain Aung Phyo Kyaw — were posthumously awarded the rank of captain by SAC leader, Min Aung Hlaing, according to an official press release from the Department of War of Ka-La-La-Ta on [23 July](#). Khit Thit Media reported that the pilots were given awards of “Hero’s Degree” and “Hero Record Seal” as per SAC Order No. 125/2023. This corroborates claims that a K-8 light attack aircraft was active in the area and crashed.



Figure 3: Drone footage which purportedly shows the K-8 crash site by Ka-La-La-Ta (source: [Khit Thit Media](#)).



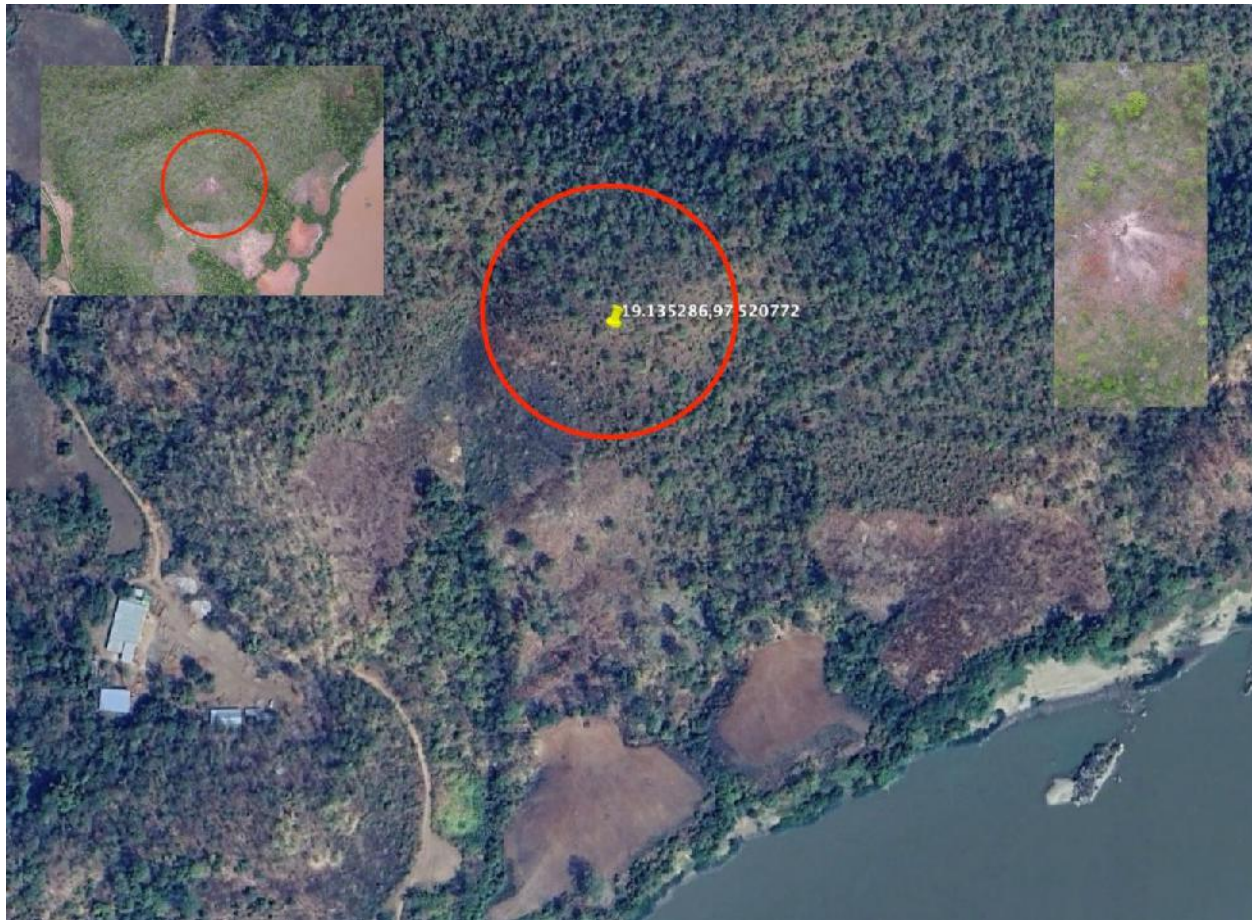


Figure 4: Geolocation of claimed plane crash [19.135286,97.520772].

## Airstrikes in Hpasawng township

On 9 July, at 1740 local time, a MAF fighter jet [reportedly](#) bombed Kyauk Pe Nyo Village in Hpasawng Township, destroying a monastery. Two people were [allegedly](#) hurt during the attack. Myanmar Witness was unable to independently verify the casualties; however, the location of the attack was verified using a still image from a video of the airstrike posted on social media and [peakvisor](#).



Figure 5: Geolocation of UGC showing the incident using peakvisor [18.833424, 97.323086]  
(sources: [Karenni Generation Youth](#), [Khit Thit Media](#), and [peakvisor](#)).

It is [reported](#) that the MAF also carried out airstrikes in Hpasawng township on 12 July 2023. Myanmar Witness identified video footage purporting to show the aftermath of the airstrike and associated damage. This was stitched together to form a panorama of the scene, which was then geolocated and cross-referenced with satellite imagery. The video shows significant damage to buildings and religious sites in the area.



Figure 6: Hpasawng Airstrike on 12 July 2023 [18.833068, 97.324233] (sources: [Karenni Generation Youth - A](#)).

## Airstrike on IDP camp

At around 0102 local time on 12 July, it is [reported](#) that the Myanmar Air Force bombed an IDP camp on the Karenni-Thai border, killing a 10-year-old child, seriously injuring others and damaging houses. Myanmar Witness has been unable to independently verify the casualties. The camp was housing a population of more than [5,000](#) Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who had already fled conflict elsewhere in the country. These individuals are in need of shelter and food assistance.

Images of the airstrike's aftermath published by the [media](#) and local civil society organisations' pages were identified and geolocated by Myanmar Witness, as well as UGC showing the site before and after the airstrike allegedly took place. Through this process, Myanmar Witness has identified that the events took place at the Daw Noe Ku IDP Camp, in Shadaw township, Kayah state and confirmed the camps location at [19.32696180, 97.8187087].



Figure 7: Geolocation of the camp before the incident took place [19.32696180, 97.8187087] (source: [video published](#) by local affiliated page).



Figure 8: [Top] Geolocation of Daw Noe Kue Camp after the incident took place [19.32696180, 97.8187087] (Left image: google maps; Right image: [Facebook](#) post by the non-profit organisation CTER-Karenni). [Bottom] Photo of elementary text book from school nearby IDP camp (source: [video published](#) by local affiliated page).



Figure 9: Image purporting to show the bomb crater in the middle of Daw Noe Ku camp (source: [video published](#) by local affiliated page).

## Airstrikes in Kyauk Su village

An 11-year-old child and an IDP were [reportedly](#) killed in an airstrike in Kyauk Su village, Mese township, on 12 July 2023. Although Myanmar Witness could not independently confirm the number of deaths, it was possible to geolocate the site of the airstrike using UGC.



Figure 10: Geolocation of airstrike on 12 July at Kyauk Su (ကျောက်စု) village, Mese township [18.769276, 97.389804] (sources: [Delta News Agency](#)).

According to UGC, a middle school in the same village, Kyauk Su, was also bombed on 26 July 2023 (source redacted due to privacy concerns). Although Myanmar Witness could not confirm the exact date, the location was verified.

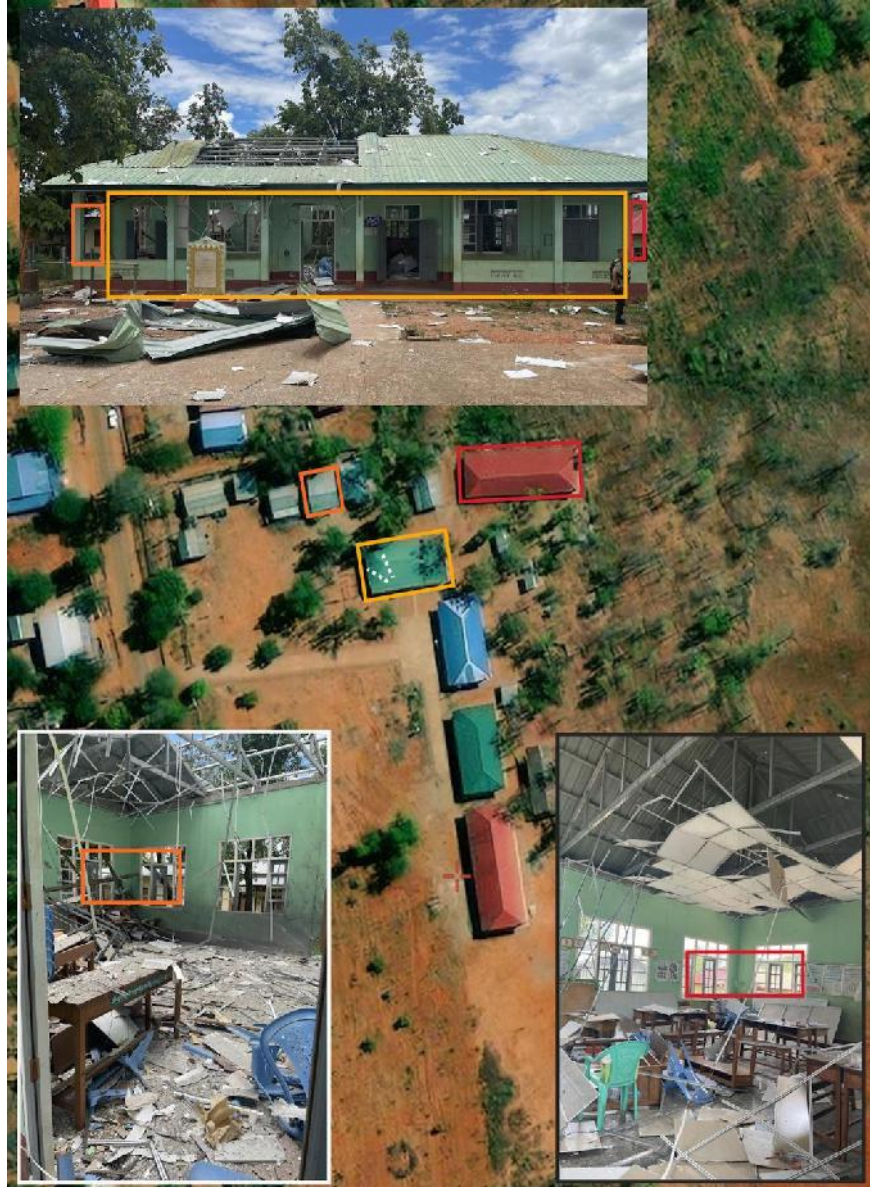


Figure 11: Geolocation of the middle school was bombed in Kyauk Su village on 26 July [18.769715, 97.387388] (sources: source redacted due to privacy concerns).

## Clashes and airstrike in Thantaunggyi township

A fierce battle was [reported](#) on the morning of 18 July 2023 near Yar Do village, Thantaunggyi township. Soon after 0900, the MAF allegedly carried out an airstrike on the village. The airstrike was captured in a [video](#) posted on Facebook by the Kantarawaddy Times, and can be seen at 0.08 seconds. Myanmar Witness was able to verify the location of the airstrike.



Figure 12: Geolocation of Yar Do village on 18 July 2023 [19.358822, 96.802461] (sources: [bottom] Google maps, [top] [Kantarawaddy Times](#)).



## Additional unverified airstrikes

While efforts have been taken to collect as much information as possible on airstrikes in Kayah state over this time period, a number of other airstrikes reportedly took place in the region during this timeframe which Myanmar Witness were unable to verify or partially verify. For example, on 1 June 2023, the Kayan Thit (ကယန်းသစ်) Security Gate in the western part of Moby Township (မိုးဗြဲ) was [reportedly](#) hit by an airstrike. Additionally, on 14 June around 2125 local time, it is [claimed](#) that the Myanmar military fired at least 15 rounds of heavy weapons into the Moby military camp. The following day, at 0200 local time, an airstrike was reported. Myanmar Witness will continue to look for more information on these events, and others in the area, in order to verify their occurrence.

## Future monitoring

Kayah state has been the site of conflict since the February 2021 coup. Like other regions in Myanmar, the conflict is escalating and the use of airstrikes has become commonplace. Both Karenni resistance fighters and civilians have been caught up in the attacks.

Myanmar Witness continues to monitor, document and investigate human rights violations, as well as SAC activity, in Kayah state. The impact of attacks on locations used by civilians, including IDP camps, must also be monitored.

## Abbreviations

- Border Guard Forces - BGF
- Internally Displaced Peoples - IDPs
- Myanmar Air Force - MAF
- People's Defence Force - PDF
- Security Administrative Council - SAC
- User-generated Content - UGC
- Light Infantry Division - LID