

FORCED TO ENLIST

THE IMPACTS OF MILITARY CONSCRIPTION IN SOUTHEASTERN BURMA



A REPORT BY THE
HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION OF MONLAND
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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the attempted military coup nearly four years ago on 1 February 2024, Burma has experienced increasingly widespread human rights abuses perpetrated by the military. Among these violations, the enforcement of a forced conscription law has emerged as a brutal tool of control, primarily targeting young men and women across the country.

This report, *Forced to Enlist: The Impact of Military Conscription in Southeastern Burma*, will provide a detailed analysis of these abuses, focusing specifically on the Mon, Karen, and Tanintharyi regions—areas where the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) has extensively documented the impact of these practices in Southern Burma. Additional reporting supports our findings, as detailed in HURFOM’s May 2024 briefing paper, ‘Forced to Fight: Military Conscription in Southeastern Burma.’

The forced conscription law has not only infringed on the fundamental rights of individuals but has also spread fear and intimidation throughout communities, leading to the mass displacement of civilians. Throughout southeastern Burma and much of the nation, the junta’s aggressive conscription efforts have faced strong resistance. Those who have courageously opposed the military are met with severe consequences such as imprisonment, torture and even death.

The long-term consequences of the forced conscription policies for regional stability in Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region are severe and multifaceted. The disruption of social structures, the psychological trauma inflicted on individuals and communities, and the resulting displacement and migration have all contributed to an environment of instability that will be difficult to overcome.

Compounding these abuses, the junta has recently formed “people’s security and anti-terrorism groups” as part of a nationwide strategy to bolster its weakening control. The regime has created a committee tasked with training, arming, and supplying militias at the village and ward levels, extending its reach into local communities.

This strategy attempts to mitigate the military’s mounting losses against resistance forces, including those documented in HURFOM’s targeted areas. The supervising

and directing groups who are trained and backed by the junta, provide logistics support, military training, and recruitment of civilians and technicians.

These militias are intended to support military operations. However, the forced recruitment and arming of civilians have instilled further fear among local populations, leading to heightened insecurity. While the junta claims that the recruitment process is in the national interest of the country, the reality suggests otherwise, as many recruits are coerced into joining through physical and verbal threats or financial incentives.

Given the scale and severity of the abuses associated with the conscription law, HURFOM recognizes the urgent need for a detailed investigation into its implementation and effects. This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the violations and abuses perpetrated by the junta in enforcing this law, with a particular emphasis on how it has affected the lives of young people and civilians in the Mon State, Karen State, and Tanintharyi region.

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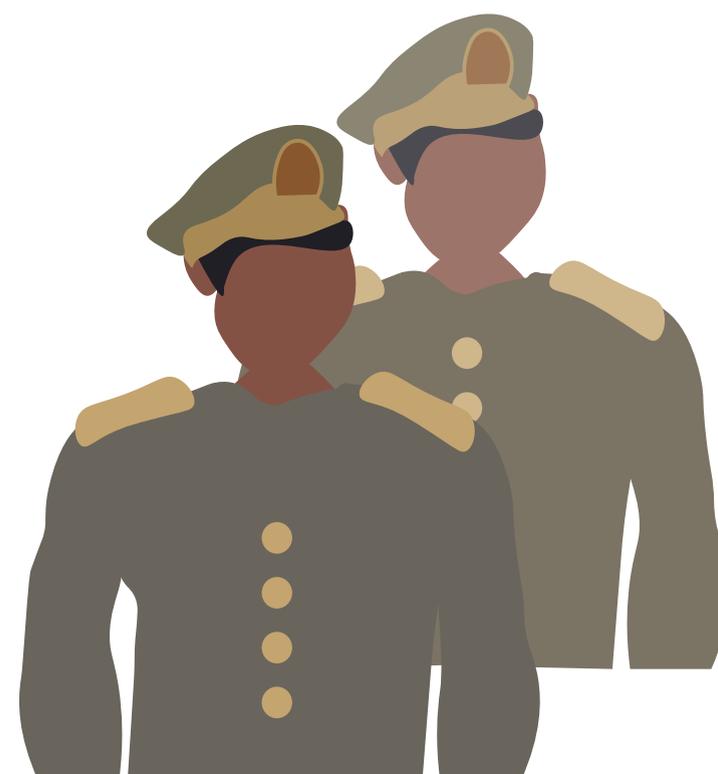
This report has two purposes:

1

To document the human rights violations resulting from the junta's conscription efforts, providing a record that can be used for future accountability measures;

2

To raise awareness within the international community about the ongoing crisis in Burma, advocating for more decisive intervention to protect the rights and lives of those affected by these oppressive practices.



Further, it will reveal the various aspects of these tyrannous measures, offering a comprehensive view of how the forced conscription law and the formation of local militias have been implemented and their impact on targeted populations. Detailed case studies, testimonials, and analyses will highlight the ongoing struggles faced by the people of the Mon, Karen, and Tanintharyi regions.

The report also calls for immediate action from the international community to address these egregious human rights violations and to act to stop the violence against civilians immediately.

The primary objectives are:

1. To document and analyze the implementation of the forced conscription law in the targeted regions, highlighting the specific tactics used by the junta to enforce the law and the impact on local populations.
2. To provide detailed case studies and testimonials from individuals and communities affected by the conscription law, offering a human perspective on the consequences of this policy.
3. To assess the broader implications of the conscription law on the social, economic, and political landscape in Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi region, considering both the immediate and long-term effects on the affected populations.
4. To call for international attention and action to address the ongoing human rights violations associated with the Junta's conscription law and to support efforts to hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

This document is intended to serve as a resource for policymakers, human rights advocates, and the international community. It will provide information needed to understand the scope of the junta's abuses and advocate for meaningful intervention to protect the rights and lives of the people of Burma.

By shedding light on these issues, HURFOM hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of the Junta's systematic abuses and support efforts to achieve justice and accountability for the people of Burma. These findings will follow up on our May 2024 report, ["Forced to Fight,"](#) which provided an overview of how the enforcement of forced conscription has affected communities across southeastern Burma.

FIELDWORKERS NOTE



HURFOM has fieldworkers in Mon State, Karen State, and Tanintharyi Region, as well as human rights networks. Several reporters work from Mon and Karen State in areas controlled by ethnic revolution organizations. Given the extreme daily risks, our field workers continue to document human rights violations to the best of their ability without compromising their security.

The growing threats to their safety only speak to the society of fear the junta has created. HURFOM's documentation and data are sourced from our network of field staff reporting on the ground. The restrictions imposed by the junta have made it much more challenging to access our target areas freely and without repercussions.

HURFOM field staff face severe risks to their physical and digital security. Secure communication methods, such as encrypted technology, have been adopted. However, there are still many challenges to ensuring that the Burma Army does not infiltrate our work and documentation.

The military is known for intimidating and harassing fieldworkers documenting human rights violations. Soldiers often threaten survivors who share their stories with rights groups as well. Currently, HURFOM can safely work in ceasefire areas and the armed territories controlled by the Karen National Union and the New Mon State Party. Recording events and testimonies is extremely high-risk outside these areas, and the military's movement restrictions limit the documentation possible.

The information outlined in this report includes HURFOM data and cases from the ground by local fieldworkers. Given our challenges in collecting this data, many of our estimates are likely significantly higher.

BACKGROUND

The ongoing crisis in Burma, marked by widespread violence and repression under the military junta, has brought untold suffering to millions of civilians, particularly in regions with strong ethnic identities and histories of resistance. HURFOM has contributed to documenting these abuses, specifically focusing on the Mon, Karen, and Tanintharyi regions.

The forced conscription law implemented by the junta is one of the most severe and invasive policies enforced by the military regime. The impacts have been devastating, contributing to a climate of fear and insecurity and forcing thousands to flee their homes to avoid conscription.

OVERVIEW OF THE MILITARY JUNTA

The Burmese military, known as the Tatmadaw, has attempted to control the nation's political scene for years. Its role became especially troubling after the coup on February 1, 2021, when the junta, led by General Min Aung Hlaing, ousted the democratically elected government. This event initiated a severe crackdown marked by extensive human rights abuses, such as the violent suppression of peaceful protests, arbitrary arrests, and extrajudicial killings.

The junta's rule has been defined by its reliance on authoritarian measures to maintain control over the country. One of the most controversial and oppressive tactics employed by the junta is the enforcement of a forced conscription law, aimed at bolstering its military ranks amid growing resistance from various ethnic armed organizations and civilian defense forces. The junta's approach has drawn widespread condemnation from the international community, human rights organizations, and the people of Burma.

THE JUNTA'S RULE HAS BEEN DEFINED BY ITS RELIANCE ON AUTHORITARIAN MEASURES TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OVER THE COUNTRY. ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL AND OPPRESSIVE TACTICS EMPLOYED BY THE JUNTA IS THE ENFORCEMENT OF A FORCED CONSCRIPTION LAW.

OVERVIEW OF THE FORCED CONSCRIPTION LAW

The 2010 People's Military Service Law, mandating conscription, began being enforced for the first time since it was passed in February 2024. Its implementation over a decade later represents a shift in its concerns over the increasing gains in territory, bases, and camps from ethnic armed organizations and civilian defense forces. Reports from HURFOM's target areas indicate that conscripted individuals, often youths, are subsequently deployed to frontline battles, forced to fight under threat of violence.

The junta defends conscription as a necessary response to what it views as an existential threat from armed resistance groups. It claims that compulsory military service is crucial for upholding national security and sovereignty, especially considering what it labels as "terrorist activities" conducted by opposition forces. However, this rationale is widely seen as a cover for the junta's broader objective of suppressing dissent and attempting to control the population.

The law includes provisions for deferments and exemptions, but these are often applied inconsistently, with wealthier and more influential individuals finding ways to avoid service. It is enforced with particular vigour in regions where the junta faces significant losses, such as Mon State, Karen State, and Tanintharyi, where young people are frequently forcibly recruited.

Once conscripted, individuals are often deployed to the front lines, where they are used as human shields, intensifying potential recruits' fear. The high risk and harsh conditions discourage enlistment, yet the junta persists with this approach to counter high desertion rates within its ranks.

In addition, the military is pressuring business owners and using public funds to finance military conscription, diverting resources intended for civilian needs. This misuse of public assets to fund a war against pro-democracy groups has raised serious concerns. Within Mon State, Karen State, and the northern Tanintharyi Region, at least 23 cases were reported in which parents paid bribes, ranging from 3 to 5 million kyats per case, to avoid sending their sons and daughters to fight.

The junta has primarily targeted recruitment for men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27. However, the junta has extended these age limits to fill recruitment gaps. A newly enforced military directive mandated that all men aged 35 to 65 across Burma join local security oversight groups operating at the ward and village levels.

Recruits must undergo military training as part of this directive. Senior General Aung Lin Dwe, the junta's secretary, formalized the order on August 16 under the newly established Central Security and Counter-Terrorism Supervisory Committee.

This committee, functioning under the "People's Security and Counter-Terrorism Central Supervisory Group/Team," is tasked with forming security surveillance teams at regional, district, township, and local levels, equipping them with arms, and overseeing their training.

According to the directive, men within the specified age group are required to attend training courses and serve in local security units:

"All men aged 35 to 65 nationwide are expected to participate in military training within their wards and villages. Subsequently, they must join local security and anti-terrorism groups," said a military source in Naypyidaw, adding:

"While younger men under 35 are being called for monthly conscription training, those outside this category must serve in these newly established security groups."



The formation of these local security and anti-terrorism units has already begun, including in several areas of Mon State and Tanintharyi Region. For instance, residents of Thanbyuzayat Township in Mon State and some men in Hpa-an Township of Karen State reported that all men aged 35 to 65 in the wards and villages had been enlisted into the local security group.

The directive further permits the Central Security and Counter-Terrorism Supervisory Committee to oversee the formation of security teams, equip them with necessary arms, and coordinate their logistical support.

This includes equipping teams with weapons, providing essential supplies, organizing military training, and preparing strategic responses for combat scenarios. The units will also handle communication, casualty evacuation, and replacing lost human resources and soldiers.

Moreover, the committee would coordinate regional security responsibilities, assign tasks to different regions, and ensure logistical and operational readiness. They will also recruit specialists to handle high-tech weaponry and provide incentives such as deferments, exemptions, and support for soldiers and their families, particularly those who are wounded or killed in action.

Through these new security forces, the junta aims to strengthen its control at local levels, as reports indicate increased militarization and recruitment efforts across the country.

HURFOM's field documentation has recorded widespread cases of forced recruitment across the Mon, Karen, and Tanintharyi regions. Young men, including minors, are being forcibly conscripted, threatened with violence, and made to serve as soldiers.

These actions are consistent with documented reports from local communities that the conscripted individuals are being sent to the frontlines, forced to engage in combat, and, in many cases, sacrificed in battle.

This deliberate targeting of civilians highlights the junta's coercive tactics, transforming unwilling civilians into soldiers to further their military objectives.

Moreover, the junta's actions have led to:

- Widespread displacement of civilians due to forced recruitment and fear of violence. In HURFOM's target areas, families are fleeing their homes to escape conscription, increasing by internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Enforced disappearances of conscripted civilians, with families unable to trace their loved ones whom the military has taken. This is consistent with patterns observed in other parts of Burma, where civilians have been detained or forcibly recruited without any legal justification.

These actions by the junta meet the criteria for crimes against humanity as they involve systematic attacks against civilian populations. Further, the implementation of the conscription law has led to widespread fear and instability, particularly among young people who are the primary targets of this policy. The law has not only resulted in the forced recruitment of individuals into military service but has also contributed to the displacement of thousands of civilians, as many flee their homes to escape conscription.

GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION IN HURFOM TARGET AREAS: MON STATE, KAREN STATE, AND THE TANINTHARYI REGION

Organizers, campaigners and civil society organizations in Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region have been at the forefront of the resistance against the military junta.

As a result, those in opposition have faced some of the most severe repercussions under the junta. These areas, rich in ethnic diversity and home to several ethnic armed organizations, have been targeted by the junta's conscription efforts due to their strategic importance and the strong presence of opposition forces.



MON STATE

Located in southeastern Burma, Mon State has a long history of conflict between the central government and ethnic Mon groups seeking greater autonomy. The region has seen significant military activity, with the junta targeting young men and women for conscription, often using coercive measures to force compliance.



KAREN STATE

Known for its longstanding armed struggle for independence, Karen State has been one of the most heavily militarized regions in Burma. The conscription law has exacerbated the already dire situation in the region, leading to widespread displacement as young people flee to avoid forced recruitment.



TANINTHARYI REGION

This coastal region, which borders Thailand, has been a critical resistance area against the junta. The junta's conscription efforts in Tanintharyi have been particularly aggressive, with reports of mass arrests, forced recruitment, and severe punishments for those who resist.

In all three regions, the implementation of the conscription law has had devastating effects on local communities, contributing to a cycle of violence, displacement, and human rights abuses.

HISTORY OF THE FORCED CONSCRIPTION LAW

The concept of military conscription in Burma has a long and complex history, rooted in the country's past and subsequent struggles for independence. During the British colonial era, conscription was implemented to bolster military forces, particularly during World War II, when Burmese men were recruited to fight alongside the allies.

Following independence in 1948, the Burmese nascent government maintained a standing military but did not enforce a formal conscription policy. Instead, the military relied on voluntary enlistment, sufficient to meet the country's defense needs during the early years of independence.

Historically, the military has resorted to forced recruitment during times of conflict, particularly in ethnic minority regions. During the long-running civil wars that have plagued the country since independence, the military often conscripted villagers, particularly young men, to serve as porters or soldiers. These practices were widespread in regions like the Karen and Mon States, where the military faced strong resistance from ethnic armed groups.

However, as internal conflicts intensified, particularly with ethnic armed groups, the government began to consider conscription as a necessary measure to sustain its military campaigns. The post-independence period was marked by ongoing civil conflicts, especially in regions like Mon, Karen, and Tanintharyi, where ethnic groups resisted the central government's authority. These regions became focal points of military activity. Over time, the idea of conscription became increasingly appealing to military leadership to ensure a steady supply of soldiers.

Under General Ne Win's military rule in the 1960s, the government formalized its control over the armed forces but stopped short of implementing widespread conscription. Instead, the regime maintained a volunteer army supplemented by forced recruitment in conflict zones, mainly targeting ethnic minorities.

This practice laid the groundwork for the forced conscription policies that would emerge in later decades, particularly under the junta. Following the attempted coup in 2021, the junta established itself as the State Administration Council (SAC).

The current enforcement of conscription under the junta represents a significant escalation compared to these earlier practices. The current law is broader in scope and more systematically enforced, targeting not only young men but also women in some cases. The military's conscription efforts have been marked by a higher degree of coercion and violence, with entire communities targeted for recruitment. In contrast to the past, where conscription was often localized and ad hoc, the current system is national in scope and backed by formal legislation.

Furthermore, the junta has expanded the use of conscription to include the recruitment of militia forces known as Pyu Saw Htee and the abduction of civilians to serve as soldiers or porters. These practices have been particularly devastating in areas where the population has already suffered greatly from decades of conflict. The current wave of conscription has led to widespread displacement as young people flee their homes to avoid being forcibly recruited and has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.

The military's implementation of forced conscription represents a continuation and intensification of its historical practices of coercion and violence. The legal framework provided by the conscription law has been used to justify widespread human rights abuses. The impact of these practices has been devastating, contributing to the displacement of thousands of civilians and further entrenching the cycle of violence and repression in Burma.

PART 2: VIOLATIONS OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION IN TARGET AREAS



MON STATE

The HURFOM field team has documented an alarming rise in human rights violations as the military junta ramps up forced conscription efforts. Young men in Mon State are increasingly being targeted for arbitrary arrests at checkpoints, in workplaces, and even within their villages. Mon State has been one of the junta's primary targets for recruitment due to its strategic location and strong ethnic identity.

HURFOM's analysis reveals that young people in Mon State are being systematically targeted, particularly those from rural areas where resistance to the junta is strong. The documentation shows a clear pattern of intimidation and violence used to coerce young people into military service.

Families who resist these efforts face severe repercussions, including arrests, beatings, and even execution.

The junta has also been known to use civilians as human shields during military operations, further endangering their lives. The presence of military forces in civilian areas has led to increased instances of sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killings, exacerbating the already dire human rights situation in Mon State.

Local sources have documented numerous cases where individuals were forcibly taken from their homes or workplaces and conscripted into the military. These individuals, often young and with little to no military training, are thrust into combat roles, leading to severe trauma and, in many cases, death.

In one case documented by HURFOM, a 22-year-old man from Mudon Township was forcibly conscripted after refusing to join the military. He was taken from his home in the middle of the night, beaten, and transported to a remote military camp. His family received no information about his whereabouts for weeks, and when they finally located him, he had been severely injured during training. Such cases are common in Mon State, where the military uses fear and intimidation to force young men into service.

The fear of forced frontline deployment has grown among residents, as many young people from Mon State who were previously conscripted into the regular army—whether voluntarily or forcibly—were sent to the frontlines, where many lost their lives. Now, there is a growing concern that middle-aged men recruited into the militias may face the same fate despite their age.

CASES OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION IN MON STATE

AUGUST 2024

Since the first week of August 2024, the junta has initiated door-to-door checks, arresting those on military service lists.

“They’re rounding up people and are saying they’ve been selected for military service. In our neighbourhood, there were about four people taken away. But when they came to arrest more people, no one was left—everyone had already fled,” said a resident of Kyaik Hto.

The junta actively searches for youths from six Kyaik Hto neighbourhoods and nearby villages using pre-prepared name lists. As a result, many young locals are fleeing to KNU (Karen National Union) territory in Thaton District or Thailand; some are even escaping by sea, according to HURFOM reports.

“There are no more young people left in the neighbourhoods. Some have joined the KNU, some have fled to Thailand, and some have gone abroad and haven’t returned,” shared another Kyaik Hto resident.

In a disturbing contrast, it has been reported that the military junta is demanding bribes of 4 to 6 million Myanmar Kyats per person from those who can afford it, allowing them to substitute someone else in their place for military service.

According to independent research organizations, including the New Rehmonnya Federated Force (NRFF), nearly 1,000 people in Mon State have been conscripted in military drafts from Batch 1 to 4. These developments highlight the ongoing struggles faced by the youth in Kyaik Hto Township as they seek to avoid forced conscription under the military regime.

Since late July 2024, the military junta has been inspecting household documents in Maw Ka Nin village, Ye Township, Mon State. Alongside this, they have been photographing young men. These nightly door-to-door checks in Kaw Swell Ward occur daily. If they identify a young man aged 18 or older, they photograph him, according to a local youth reporting to HURFOM.

“They’ve started checking at 5 PM every day. They check every house. If they find young men 18 years of age or above, they take a photo record of them. We asked, ‘Why do you take photos?’ and they replied, ‘We have to keep records,’ but we don’t understand what kind of record,” said a young lady from Kaw Swell Ward.

Village administrators in some villages of Ye Township have issued an order that every household must send their household list documents, along with their house number, to the administrator’s office. However, they have not revealed the reason for this request, so no one has sent their documents.

In Mon State, residents of rural and urban areas like Mawlamyine, Chaungzon Township, Thanbyuzayat, Kyike Hto, and Thaton have been forced to make monthly financial contributions under the guise of military conscription support. On August 17th, administrative officers, alongside local neighbourhood committees in areas such as Myine Thayar, Kywel Kone, Phet Khin, Zay Gyo, and Taung Wain in Mawlamyine, were actively collecting these funds.



The junta in Thaton Township, Mon State, has issued a new directive targeting young men for forced conscription. Authorities were ordered to arrest any two men found riding the same motorbike and send them directly to military training camps.

Although not mandated by the National Conscription Law, residents must contribute between 5,000 and 20,000 kyats per household, varying by area. This has sparked widespread criticism among locals, who see it as unlawful and exploitative.

The funds are reportedly intended to aid conscripts' families, yet there is no clear information on who oversees these collections or how the money is allocated. Many residents, fearing arrest, comply with the demands despite the lack of transparency and public consent.

A legal expert criticized the practice, calling it deliberate exploitation, not lawful action. Amid rising inflation and economic hardship, some unemployed men have joined the military as substitutes for conscripted individuals, receiving payments between 3 and 5 million kyats. The situation has deteriorated, with residents frequently enduring these unlawful collections, worsened by the economic challenges many already face.

Similarly, junta forces in Chaung Zone Township, Mon State, have begun forcibly collecting monthly fees from villagers to support conscription efforts. Since May, U Zaw Win Naing, the general administrative chief of Chaung Zone Township, has ordered village and ward administrators to collect 10,000 kyats monthly from each household in select villages. The fees are allegedly intended to support military trainees.

A resident reported that while some villages have not yet been targeted, others have been paying the fee under pressure from the junta for the past three months:

“The villages on our side have not been collected yet, but a household in another village has had to pay 10,000 kyats per month for about three months now,” said the resident.

The situation in Chaung Zone Township is particularly dire due to the high number of conscripts being recruited.

On September 3, the junta in Mon State officially opened Batch 5 of conscription training. Key officials led the event, including U Aung Kyi Thein, the Chief Minister of Mon State and Chairman of the Military Recruitment Committee; Major General Kyaw Lin Maung, Commander of the Southeastern Military Headquarters; and Lt. Col. Kyaw Swar Myint, Deputy Chairman of the Military Recruitment Committee. The training occurred at No. 6 Military Education School of the Southeastern Military Headquarters in Mawlamyine.

Although no official statement has been made regarding the number of participants in Batch 5, residents have raised concerns about the recruitment process. A local woman from Mon State stated:

“They convinced people that those who serve in the military in Mon State won’t be transferred to the front lines. However, those facing financial difficulties, mainly migrant workers, are sometimes replaced, and neighbourhood administrators collect monthly fees, claiming it’s for the support of conscripts’ families.”

Despite the junta’s claims that conscripts in previous batches were assigned only for security duties and not sent to the front lines, local sources and resistance groups have reported that some recruits from the first and second batches were deployed to conflict zones.

Military conscription training in Mon State is being conducted at Tatmadaw Advanced Training School No. 4 in Wae Kali village, Thanbyuzayat Township, and Basic Military Training School No. 9 in Thaton Township. This conscription process continues to raise concerns among residents as tensions and conflict persist across the region.

In Mon State, some village and ward administrators are avoiding their duties. Each ward is pressured to provide three young men for military service as the junta faces increasing shortages due to continuous losses nationwide.

Residents report that administrators are recruiting replacements for military training, but a shortage of substitutes has led to forced conscriptions. Migrant workers were once able to pay administrators to act

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as substitutes, but the current shortage has caused the junta to summon youths directly from their homes.

“They’re aggressively trying to take as many young people as possible, forcing families to provide three youths per ward. In some cases, where no males are left in households, women are taken. Militia groups are going door to door, threatening people,” explained a Mawlamyine resident.

Some administrators have gone into hiding to avoid participating in the forced conscriptions, but the junta’s militia groups continue recruitment efforts. In the past, families paid between 3 million to 5 million kyat to avoid military service, but now, many cannot afford the substitute fees. Wealthy families are charged fees up to 500,000 kyat monthly, while poorer families are charged smaller amounts.

Since September 2024, over 2,000 Mon State residents have been conscripted into military service. They are being trained at military academies in Thanbyuzayat and Thaton Townships.

Overall, the intensified conscription efforts reveal a regime under strain. The regime seeks to maintain its military dominance while facing growing resistance and widespread disapproval from local communities.

Following previous rounds where poverty-stricken and migrant workers were forcibly conscripted, the military junta has initiated the recruitment of new individuals for Batch 6 military training in Mon State.

Mon State Chief Minister U Aung Kyi Thein visited conscripts undergoing training on October 16 at the No. 6 Education School of the Southeastern Military Command Headquarters. According to a statement released by the junta, he provided financial support to the trainees during his visit. While the exact number of recruits has not been officially disclosed, photographic evidence suggests that approximately 120 people were conscripted for this batch.

According to residents of Mawlamyine, junta-appointed officials are covertly organizing the conscription process, using financial incentives to fill the ranks left vacant by soldiers who have fallen on the battlefield.

“The junta, struggling in the war, has enforced a mandatory conscription law to replenish their forces at the frontlines. They are primarily sending young individuals to these dangerous areas,” one resident remarked.

In addition, junta officials discreetly collect monthly conscription fees from business owners and civilians across several townships, including Chaungzon, Mawlamyine, Thaton, Kyaikhto, Ye, Thanbyuzayat, and Kyaikmayaw. The funds are primarily used to target economically disadvantaged and migrant workers and to entice them into conscription.



On the night of November 19, at 10 PM, joint forces of the military junta carried out mass arrests in Sin Yaw Village, Paung Township, Mon State, targeting 20 young men from three local cobble production companies. The detainees are being forcibly conscripted into military service.

Previously, migrant workers were paid between 3 to 5 million kyats to serve as substitutes for those unable to enlist. However, with the rising death toll at the frontlines, fewer individuals are willing to be substitutes, prompting the junta to offer over 5 million kyats to secure replacements.

Resistance groups have responded by issuing public statements encouraging the conscripted individuals to defect and join revolutionary forces, highlighting the growing dissent against forced military service.

The implementation of the conscription law has led to an exodus of young people from Mon State, many of whom have fled to Thailand and Malaysia as migrant workers to escape being drafted.

With substitute recruits becoming scarce, junta-appointed township and village administrators have begun personally summoning young people to their homes, causing heightened fears among local families.

Since the initiation of conscription, approximately 2,000 individuals have been forcibly recruited across six rounds. The conscripts are training at the No. 4 Officer Training School in Wae Ka Li village, Thanbyuzayat Township, and at the No. 9 Basic Military Training School in Thaton Township.

The continued forced recruitment and covert funding tactics used by the junta underscore the regime's attempts to maintain their weakening military presence, even at the cost of uprooting local communities and disrupting lives.

As the junta continues its oppressive conscription policies, tension in the region remains high. Civilians find themselves caught between the fear of military coercion and the threat of resistance actions against pro-junta administrators.

NOVEMBER 2024

Beginning in November, local officials have dispatched representatives to visit homes, asking for payments of 5,000 to 10,000 kyats from each household to finance substitutes for military service Batch 7. It has been reported that wealthier residents and business owners are being requested to contribute amounts ranging from 30,000 to 100,000 kyats per household.

The administrators do not directly manage the collections. Instead, ward leaders, firefighters, militia members, and members of local administrative committees who are in civilian clothing carry out the collections.

“More than ten people came, with those in civilian clothes acting as security. They all wore civilian attire and carried blank notebooks, aiming to record details of 500 households,” shared a resident.

In October 2024, incidents were documented in Thanbyuzayat, Mudon, and Paung in Mon State for Batch 6. In these cases, parents paid between 10,000,000 MMK and 15,000,000 MMK to secure the release of their sons.

Due to threats from the military, warning families of severe consequences if information leaked, many affected individuals refrained from providing detailed accounts. This highlights the scale of corruption and exploitation by the junta’s military officials, who are engaging in significant financial abuses through these ransom practices.

In Mawlamyine, administrators involved in these collection efforts have been met with resistance. A ward administrator reportedly received a bullet and a warning letter, leading them to travel with armed escorts for protection.



The Central Recruitment Committee, led by Lieutenant General Tin Aung San, instructed legal action against those evading conscription during a meeting on November 7.

On October 10, another warning and a bullet were sent to a Mawlamyine ward administrator engaged in fee collections. This came after the People's Defense Force (PDF) in Mawlamyine District issued a statement on September 11, cautioning administrator U Than Htike of the Maung Ngan area that he would face serious consequences for enforcing the National Conscription Law.

Of additional concern is that in coordination with the General Administration Department (GAD) and other defence forces under their control, the Mon State junta is deploying increasingly exploitative methods to meet the required conscription quotas for the upcoming Batch No. 7 of military service training.

HURFOM field reporters have revealed that the junta is issuing fake Mon State identification cards to migrant workers from other regions, falsely registering them as Mon State residents to compel their participation in military training programs.

Local sources report that junta officials, including village and ward administrators, are actively creating these fraudulent identification documents. Migrant workers, often working in Mon State for daily wages, are being lured or coerced into military training under the pretext of being Mon State natives.

Many of these workers are targeted because they lack the resources or influence to resist the junta's tactics, which include falsifying household registration records and educational credentials.

A local administrator in the recruitment process shared:

“They collect lists village by village. The priority is registering Mon State residents, but when they cannot find enough people, they falsify household documents, IDs, and other records. They collaborate with immigration officials to make it appear legitimate. This is happening everywhere, including Mudon and Chaungzon townships.”

The military's recruitment efforts have become increasingly aggressive as willing conscripts have sharply declined. The junta has resorted to offering impunity to individuals with criminal records, misleading unemployed

youth with promises of financial incentives, and even targeting migrant workers with no connections to Mon State. Sources indicate that the junta has been using funds forcibly collected from the public to pay up to 5 to 6 million kyat per conscript, further deepening the financial burden on civilians.

Additionally, reports suggest that migrant workers from other states and regions, many of whom are ethnic Burmese, are being given Mon State identification cards. This has raised concerns among Mon communities about the long-term demographic impact, as there are fears of increased Burmanization and a loss of Mon cultural identity.

A local source involved in the recruitment process stated:

“This conscription is being carried out with full knowledge of the junta’s military recruitment oversight committee. They have turned a blind eye to these exploitative practices. Even young men recruited on rental contracts are being paid with funds extorted from local people.”

To further surveil civilians, the Township General Administration Department in Thaton Township, Mon State, has issued a directive to arrest any two men riding a motorcycle together for conscription into the military, according to sources close to the junta.

The order comes amidst the military’s struggle to meet recruitment targets for the upcoming Batch 7 military training program as more individuals evade enlistment.

People are also being arrested for attempting to evade conscription. Two young men, Kyaw Chan Nyein Saw and Ko Htee Hlaing Win, both 30 years old, from Mottama Kywe Cham village in Paung Township, Mon State, have been charged under the National Conscription Law with evading mandatory military service.

They were accused of fleeing instead of attending mandatory military training after being selected through the conscription process. The two were formally charged on November 17 at the Mottama Township police station. If found guilty under Article 23 of the National Conscription Law, they could face up to three years in prison, a fine, or both.

The Central Recruitment Committee, led by Lieutenant General Tin Aung San, instructed legal action against those evading conscription during a meeting on November 7.

Research organizations indicate that over 1,500 people have been conscripted in Mon State across six rounds, with many avoiding service by paying for substitutes. The incident highlights growing concerns about forced conscription and its impact on local communities amid the junta's increasing militarization efforts.

Data collected by HURFOM and partner organizations shows that more than 21,000 young men have been forcibly conscripted into the first five batches of military training since the coup. Over 13,000 recruits from batches 1 to 3 have already been deployed to frontline combat.



KAREN STATE

The junta has long targeted the people of Karen State as it has a long history of armed conflict and resistance against various regimes. The forced conscription law has only intensified the human rights violations in this region. The Karen National Union (KNU) has been one of the most vocal opponents of the military. As a result, the Karen population has been disproportionately targeted.

The junta has carried out a variety of tactics to enforce conscription in Karen State. Detailed accounts from local human rights organizations, such as the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), document how young men and women are forcibly recruited, often at gunpoint, and sent to the frontlines.

In some cases, military forces have promised young people job opportunities or education, only to conscript them once they arrive at military facilities forcibly.

In other instances, entire villages have been surrounded by military forces, with residents given the ultimatum to either join the military or face arrest and possible execution.

Despite the immense pressure from the junta, the people of Karen State have shown remarkable resilience and resistance. Community leaders and local organizations have mobilized to protect their young people from forced conscription, often at significant personal risk.

Villages have formed defence groups in many areas to resist the junta. They work to protect their communities, hide young people from conscription, and provide safe passage to those who need to flee the area. However, these efforts are not without cost. Many who resist are captured, tortured, or killed, and entire communities can be subjected to violent reprisals.

The forced conscription law has profoundly impacted civilian life and community structures in Karen State. Traditional village life has been disrupted as many young people flee to avoid conscription, leaving behind elderly relatives who struggle to maintain their livelihoods. The social fabric of Karen society, which relies heavily on close-knit community relationships, has been severely strained.

The constant threat of military raids and forced recruitment has also led to the displacement of entire communities. Many Karen people have sought refuge in the dense jungles or crossed the border into Thailand, where they live in refugee camps under insecure conditions. These displacements have led to a loss of cultural heritage and economic and educational opportunities for displaced populations.

CASES OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION IN KAREN STATE

JULY 2024

A young woman, Naw Lay Lay, from Kawkareik District, shared an account of when the junta came to her village to recruit soldiers:

“They came for us in the middle of the night. We heard the trucks and tried to run, but there was nowhere to go. They rounded us up and forced us into the backs of their vehicles. I saw my neighbors being beaten when they tried to resist. They took us to a camp where we were treated like animals. We were given no choice – fight for them or die. I still don’t know what happened to others taken with me.”

Another local, Saw Minn Tunn from Hpa-An District, shared with HURFOM:

“My brother was only 16 when he was taken. They said they needed more fighters because they were losing control of the area. My parents begged them not to take him, but they didn’t care. We heard later that he was sent to the front lines and was killed in an ambush. He was just a boy, and they sent him to die.”

These accounts provide a stark look at the brutal reality faced by the people of Karen State under the junta. Forced conscription has torn families apart, robbed young people of their futures, and left entire communities living in fear.



TANINTHARYI REGION

The Tanintharyi Region, known for its rich natural resources and strategic coastal location, has also been heavily impacted by the junta’s conscription law. The military’s presence in this region has led to numerous cases of violence and threats against civilians.

Forced conscription in this region has primarily targeted young men, many of whom are conscripted to serve in the military’s coastal defense units. Reports from local organizations highlight instances where young men were forcibly taken from fishing villages, transported to military camps, and forced into service with little to no training.

One particularly egregious case involved a group of young men from a coastal village who were conscripted en masse after refusing to join a local militia. These men were subjected to brutal training regimens and were threatened with execution if they attempted to escape. The impact on their families and communities has been devastating, with many without their primary breadwinners.

The broader implications of forced conscription in the Tanintharyi Region are far-reaching. The disruption of community life, the loss of young people to military service, and the pervasive fear of military violence have all contributed to a breakdown in social cohesion. Communities that were once self-sufficient and resilient have been left vulnerable, with many relying on aid from humanitarian organizations to survive.

The mass exodus of young people from the region has also had a significant economic impact. Many have fled to neighboring Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries, where they live as undocumented migrants in unsafe conditions. These young migrants often face exploitation, dangerous working environments, and a lack of access to protection, compounding the trauma they have already experienced.

CASES OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION IN THE TANINTHARYI REGION

JULY 2024

During the first week of July, in a fishing village near Myeik, in the southern Tanintharyi region, the military forcibly conscripted all young men between the ages of 18 and 30. Those who refused were beaten and had their families threatened. One young man, who tried to escape conscription by hiding in the jungle, was captured and publicly executed as a warning to others.

AUGUST 2024

The junta has also been utilizing three vessels near the sea near Kyauk Kar village and Pala Chaung Wa to launch artillery attacks. In August, more than 300 residents from seven townships in Tanintharyi were arrested, and nearly 20 villagers were detained for forced conscription. The identities of those conscripted are still being investigated.

OCTOBER 2024

Residents in Dawei report that many of the junta troops patrolling the town are young locals, a development that has caused significant unease among the community. In the past, most soldiers stationed in Dawei were from other regions, but in the last two months, there has been a noticeable increase in young Dawei-speaking soldiers within the junta's ranks.

One local woman, who was stopped twice by the soldiers for questioning, confirmed that the soldiers conducting the searches were young men from Dawei:

“They’re so young—just 18 or 19; some might be even younger. They ask detailed questions in our local dialect, making it hard to deceive them,” she explained.

Recently, locals have reported hearing the local Dawei dialect spoken by soldiers patrolling major intersections in Dawei, such as near Sinneik junction. The soldiers, often fully armed and wearing uniforms with red scarves, have raised suspicions about whether they are newly trained junta soldiers or members of the Pyu Saw Htee militia.

The increase in local recruits familiar with the language and area has heightened concerns among the community.

“Before, it was rare to see soldiers who spoke our local dialect. Now, they’re everywhere, making blending in more difficult,” said an elderly male resident.

The junta’s enhanced patrols, checkpoints, and increased random searches have created a tense atmosphere in Dawei. Nearly every day, security checkpoints are set up at critical junctions.

Additionally, junta soldiers routinely conduct nighttime patrols in the city, inspecting guest records and even forcefully entering homes under the guise of security checks. This rise in local recruitment seems to be a strategic move linked to the junta’s recent conscription law, which forces locals into military service.

Some residents fear this tactic will further divide communities, as locals are now being used to suppress their people. This marks a troubling development where systematic conscription forces locals to militia and harm one another, creating mistrust and conflict within communities.



The Mon State junta, in coordination with the General Administration Department (GAD) and other defense forces under their controlled, is deploying increasingly exploitative methods to meet the required conscription quotas.

Some soldiers have defected amid the recruitment effort. In early November, six soldiers forcibly recruited and trained by the junta, including one navy officer, defected to the People's Defense Forces (PDF) under the Daw Na Armed Resistance Force in Tanintharyi Region. The defectors included five infantry soldiers from Infantry Battalion 273 in Kanbauk, Yebyu Township, and a navy officer from the Naval Command Department, according to Daw Na Armed Resistance Force sources.

“These six defectors didn’t join the military voluntarily. They were forcibly conscripted and trained under harsh conditions. The navy officer had already served for three years, while the infantry soldiers were fresh recruits from Training Batches 1 and 2. They didn’t want to be part of the military, but there was no way out for them earlier. They finally found an opportunity to escape and reached out to us for help,” explained Major Yan Naing, Commander of the Daw Na Armed Resistance Force.



Among the defectors, the navy officer brought an MA1 rifle, three magazines, and over 161 rounds of ammunition. The resistance forces granted them sanctuary and financial assistance according to standard protocol.

This isn't the first time junta soldiers have sought refuge with resistance forces. In August, another forcibly conscripted soldier defected to PDF Battalion No. 1 in Myeik District, Southern Burma. The Daw Na Armed Resistance Force encourages other junta soldiers, police officers, and conscripts—especially those forcibly recruited or who wish to join the pro-democracy movement—to defect and connect with nearby resistance groups to seek asylum.

On November 25, junta-aligned Pyu Saw Htee forces stationed at the entrance checkpoint of Ah Sin village, Ye Township, opened fire on four young men riding two motorbikes who refused to stop as instructed. While one individual was captured, three others managed to escape.

In addition to targeting travelers at checkpoints, junta forces have begun raiding workplaces to conscript eligible young men forcibly. On the night of

November 19, junta forces raided three cobble production companies in Sin Yaw village, Paung Township, and arrested 20 workers under the pretext of military conscription.

“That night alone, 20 young workers were taken. The soldiers claimed they were eligible for conscription and forcibly removed them from the premises,” said a source close to the junta who requested anonymity.

The detained workers were held at the Mottama Regional Police Station and eventually transferred to military training camps.

In the Tanintharyi Region, junta forces have been targeting local workers for forced conscription and basic military training, according to the Chairman of the KNU Tanintharyi Township and residents.

Since November 28, members of the junta-backed Pyu Saw Htee militia in Maw Taung Town have reportedly conscripted around 40 workers and begun providing them with basic military training. These sessions are held during the daytime at the Light Infantry Battalion No. 224 base near the border outpost.

“They aren’t sending them away for standard military service training. Instead, they conduct basic training in the town, similar to the training provided to Thug forces like Pyu Saw Htee members. Families of those being forced into these trainings are distraught,” said a male resident from Maw Taung.

Reports indicate that the Pyu Saw Htee militia lured the workers, who were primarily loading and unloading cargo, by falsely claiming job opportunities at the battalion. Upon arrival at the base, they were informed they would be required to attend basic military training.

Some Pyu Saw Htee militia members are reportedly leaders within the cargo handling workforce, which gives them leverage to pressure workers. The militia allegedly forced the workers to attend the training, threatening that they could only continue their jobs if they complied.

The conscripted individuals range in age from 18 to 50. The training sessions are ongoing, and there have been reports of some trainees fleeing.

“We’re monitoring the situation. Some workers have reportedly escaped and fled to Thailand, but the training is still being conducted,” said Padoh Saw Nyaw Wah, the Chairman of the KNU Tanintharyi Township.

This coercive conscription and forced military training of cargo workers have caused widespread fear among the remaining workers, their families, and residents in Maw Taung. Many are anxious about the increasing pressure and intimidation by the junta and its allied militia.

The impact on youth in Tanintharyi is profound. Many have had their education interrupted, their futures uncertain as they are either conscripted or forced to live in hiding. The psychological toll on these young people is immense, with many suffering from anxiety, depression, and trauma as a result of their experiences.

Families left behind often struggle to survive, both emotionally and economically, as the loss of young family members who provided financial support leaves them in dire circumstances. The community networks that once provided mutual support have been severely weakened, leaving many isolated and vulnerable to further abuses.

PART 3: THE IMPACTS OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION

IMPACTS ON WOMEN & YOUTH

The impact of forced conscription on young men and women has been devastating. Many young people are forced to abandon their education and careers to serve in the military against their will. The psychological toll is significant, with many experiencing severe anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Women who are conscripted face additional challenges, including sexual harassment and assault within the military ranks.

Women and young people have faced particularly severe violations under the conscription law. In addition to forced recruitment, there have been numerous reports of sexual violence perpetrated by military personnel against women in conscripted families. These abuses often go unreported due to fear of retribution, leaving victims with little recourse for justice.

A group of women and children from a village in the Tanintharyi region were held hostage by the military to force their male relatives to enlist. The women were threatened with violence, and the children were denied food and water until the men agreed to join the military. This tactic has become increasingly common in the region as the junta struggles to maintain control.

These cases highlight the extreme measures taken by the Junta to enforce conscription in Tanintharyi, using violence and threats to subjugate the local population.

Young people, particularly those from indigenous communities, have been disproportionately affected by the Junta's policies. Many have been forced to abandon their education and livelihoods to escape conscription, leading to a lost generation of youth who are deprived of opportunities for a better future.

In one harrowing case, a 19-year-old Karen woman was forcibly conscripted while working in her family's fields. She was taken to a military camp where she was subjected to physical and psychological abuse before being forced to serve as a combatant.

IMPACTS ON FAMILIES

One of the most immediate impacts of forced conscription is the breakdown of family units. The families of conscripted individuals experience significant psychological distress. The uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones, coupled with the fear of retribution from the Junta, creates a constant state of anxiety.

Parents, siblings, and spouses often suffer from chronic stress, depression, and other mental health issues as they struggle to cope with the loss of a family member to conscription. They are left in a state of uncertainty, with no updates on their loved ones. The aggressive conscription has heightened parents' anxiety.

Some resort to bribery to prevent their sons and daughters from being forced into military service. Families who can afford it reportedly pay local administrators significant sums, ranging from 2 to 3 million kyats, to exempt their children from service.

For those who cannot afford to evade recruitment financially, many of them are placed in active conflict zones without adequate training or preparation. HURFOM

received multiple accounts of conscripts, including young men from Mon State, being sent to battlegrounds in the Karen and Tanintharyi regions, where they were forced to engage in direct combat. Families of these individuals expressed their deep distress, noting that their loved ones have effectively disappeared, with no communication or information about their whereabouts.

The fear of enforced disappearance looms over many communities, with families reporting that they have been unable to communicate with those who have been taken. In some cases, attempts by families to retrieve their relatives by offering bail or paying fines were denied by authorities, adding to the distress.

The psychological impact is particularly acute for parents who feel powerless to protect their children from the military's grasp. The knowledge that their child is being forced into a life of violence and hardship is a source of profound anguish. This emotional toll can lead to strained family relationships, with some parents feeling guilt or blame for not being able to prevent their child's conscription.

The forced recruitment of young men and, in some cases, women has left many families without their primary breadwinners. Traditionally, in many of these communities, young adults contribute significantly to their households through income and by assisting with agricultural work, caring for younger siblings, and supporting elderly relatives. The sudden removal of these individuals from their families disrupts this dynamic, placing immense strain on those left behind.

Many families have been torn apart, with young men either conscripted or forced to flee, leaving their loved ones behind. Those who flee often face dangerous journeys as they attempt to cross the border into Thailand or Malaysia, where they live as undocumented migrants in precarious conditions.

Parents and older relatives often take on the additional burden of providing for the family, which can lead to increased poverty and food insecurity. In some cases, younger siblings are forced to abandon their education to help support the family, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and limiting future opportunities for social mobility.

The emotional toll on families is equally severe, as the fear and uncertainty surrounding the fate of conscripted family members weigh heavily on those left behind.

IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY

Communities in Mon State, Karen State and the Tanintharyi region have long relied on solidarity and mutual assistance to withstand external pressures, including natural disasters, economic hardship, and political repression. However, the forced conscription policy has eroded this sense of community solidarity. As young people are taken away, either forcibly conscripted or driven to flee to avoid recruitment, the communal bonds that hold these societies together are weakened.

The impact of forced conscription extends beyond the individual and familial levels to affect entire communities. The pervasive atmosphere of fear and uncertainty has a corrosive effect on communal mental health. The constant threat of military raids, the knowledge that anyone could be taken at any time, and the loss of community members all contribute to a collective sense of trauma.

Children who grow up in these environments are particularly vulnerable. They are exposed to violence, loss, and instability from a young age, which can lead to developmental issues, behavioral and long-term mental health challenges. The trauma experienced can have lasting effects, influencing their ability to form healthy relationships, succeed in school, and function in society as adults.

This erosion is further exacerbated by the atmosphere of fear and suspicion the junta fosters. Neighbors and even family members may hesitate to speak out or resist conscription efforts, fearing retaliation from the military.

In some cases, the junta has used informants within communities to identify potential recruits or those aiding them in avoiding conscription. This tactic has sown distrust among community members, undermining the cohesion essential for collective resilience

THE CONSTANT THREAT OF MILITARY RAIDS, THE KNOWLEDGE THAT ANYONE COULD BE TAKEN AT ANY TIME, AND THE LOSS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS ALL CONTRIBUTE TO A COLLECTIVE SENSE OF TRAUMA.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON RECRUITS AND CIVILIANS

The psychological impact of forced conscription on both the recruits themselves and the civilian population at large cannot be overstated. The trauma experienced by those conscripted into military service and the fear and anxiety felt by those left behind have far-reaching consequences for the mental health and well-being of entire communities.

Young men and women conscripted into the military often experience severe psychological trauma, both during the recruitment process and throughout their service. The brutal training regimens, exposure to violence, and the constant threat of death or injury take a heavy toll on their mental health.

Many recruits suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, characterized by nightmares, flashbacks, severe anxiety, and depression.

The trauma is compounded by the fact that many of these young recruits are forced to commit acts of violence against their will. Being coerced into participating in military operations against their people, including friends and family, leaves deep psychological scars. The moral and ethical conflicts they face can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and hopelessness, which may persist long after they leave the military.

IMPACT ON FUTURE GENERATIONS

Perhaps the most significant long-term consequence of forced conscription is its impact on future generations. The loss of educational opportunities, the breakdown of families, and the psychological trauma inflicted on young people all contribute to a cycle of poverty, violence, and instability that is likely to persist for years to come.

Children who grow up in this environment risk becoming a “lost generation,” deprived of the education, stability, and support they need to build a better future. Without intervention, the effects of forced conscription will continue to ripple through these communities, leaving lasting scars on the social, economic, and political fabric of the region.

IMPACTS ON DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

The forced conscription policy has also led to significant displacement and migration, both within and across Burma's borders. In Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region, thousands of young people have fled their homes to avoid conscription, often seeking refuge in neighboring Thailand, Malaysia, or other countries in the region. This mass exodus has had a profound impact on these communities' social structures.

The loss of so many young people disrupts the immediate family unit and has broader implications for the community. Due to a lack of students, schools may close or operate at reduced capacity. Agricultural and other labor-intensive industries suffer from a shortage of workers, leading to economic decline. Traditional knowledge and cultural practices passed down through generations are at risk of being lost as younger generations are scattered or consumed by the struggle for survival in foreign lands.

Junta troops have been increasingly targeting migrant workers who have been deported from Thailand, forcing them into military service. According to a Thai-based NGO, on October 15, around 200 people were arrested in Myeik Township, Tanintharyi Region, as they attempted to cross into Thailand. Of those detained, 140 individuals have been forcibly conscripted into the military.

Reports of migrant workers being intercepted and detained while traveling to Thailand have become frequent in Myeik. In early September 27 Burma, migrants repatriated by Thai authorities were also forcibly conscripted, though they managed to escape to the Karen National Union (KNU) territory in Tanintharyi Region.

In another incident, a group of migrant workers crossing the Tanintharyi border in search of work was arrested and forcibly conscripted at the Palaw Operations Command. During their detention, 29 conscripts overpowered and killed two junta guards, seized their weapons, and fled to KNU territory. However, two others from the group are still missing.

Since the regime introduced a national conscription law in February, over 1,000 people have been forcibly recruited, according to HURFOM fieldworkers.

The displacement also affects those who remain behind. Without the contributions of their younger members, communities may struggle to maintain essential services and infrastructure. Social support networks, such as those provided by religious institutions, community groups, and extended family structures, are weakened, leaving vulnerable individuals with less access to assistance in times of need.

IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES

The conscription of young people has significantly weakened the economic foundations of these regions. Agriculture, the backbone of the local economy in many areas, has been particularly hard hit by the loss of labor. With fewer young people available to work the land, agricultural output has declined, leading to food shortages and economic hardship.

The disruption of trade and market activities further exacerbates this economic decline. As communities become more isolated due to displacement and migration, the flow of goods and services is interrupted, leading to increased poverty and food insecurity. The economic decline in these regions affects individual households and has broader implications for regional stability, as poverty and economic desperation can fuel further conflict and unrest.

The forced conscription policy has also destabilized social and political structures in these regions. The junta's aggressive recruitment practices have undermined traditional leadership structures, which have long played a central role in maintaining order and resolving community conflicts. As young people are taken away or flee to avoid conscription, the authority of community leaders has weakened, and communities' ability to govern themselves is diminished.

The displacement of large segments of the population also challenges regional stability. When people are forced to leave their homes and migrate to other areas, they often find themselves in unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environments. The influx of displaced individuals into already strained regions can lead to competition for resources, social tensions, and, in some cases, violence.

The deep-seated trauma, the breakdown of trust within communities, and the economic devastation caused by the junta's policies will make it difficult to rebuild and heal once the conflict ends.

PART 4: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES TO FORCED CONSCRIPTION

RESPONSES FROM HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

The international reaction to forced conscription has been one of strong condemnation. Human rights organizations around the world have highlighted the systematic abuses carried out by the SAC under this policy, particularly in ethnic regions like Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi region.

Local organizations' documentation efforts have been instrumental in documenting abuses and providing direct support to victims. With evidence and testimony from the ground, international bodies have cited reports from civil society organizations to build a case against the junta's conscription practices. Their work has raised awareness and provided evidence for potential legal action.

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, is one of the foundational documents of international human rights law. Article 4 explicitly prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude, including forced conscription.

The junta's practices directly contravene this article by coercing individuals into military service against their will (United Nations General Assembly, art. 4).

Furthermore, Article 5 of the UDHR prohibits "torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." The harsh conditions and abuse faced by conscripts fall under this prohibition, further implicating the junta in serious human rights violations (United Nations General Assembly, art. 5).

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which entered into force in 1976, provides additional legal frameworks against forced labor and conscription.

Article 8 of the ICCPR states: "No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labor," which includes forced military service (United Nations, art. 8).

The junta's conscription policy is a direct violation of this covenant. Moreover, the forced recruitment of minors into military service, a practice reported in Burma, also violates Article 24 of the ICCPR, which mandates special protection for children (United Nations, art. 24).

Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols

The Geneva Conventions, particularly the Additional Protocols, provide comprehensive civilian protections during armed conflict. Although Burma is not a party to the Additional Protocols, the principles outlined in these conventions are widely regarded as customary international law, binding on all states.

The forced conscription of civilians, especially in conflict zones, violates Article 51 of Additional Protocol I, which protects civilians from being forced to participate in hostilities (International Committee of the Red Cross, Protocol I, art. 51). The recruitment of children into armed conflict also violates the protections provided under the Geneva Conventions.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions

Burma's forced conscription practices violate several International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions, including Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour and Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour. These conventions prohibit all forms of forced labor, and Burma, as an ILO member, must adhere to these standards. The ILO has repeatedly condemned forced conscription practices in Burma, and its reports have urged the international community to take action.



Following previous rounds where poverty-stricken and migrant workers were forcibly conscripted, the military junta has initiated the recruitment of new individuals for Batch 6.



Instead of relying solely on defense funds, the junta is pressuring business owners across various townships in Mon State to contribute to funding military conscription efforts.



Conscription has been particularly intense in junta-controlled areas such as Mawlamyine, Chaungzon, Mudon, and certain villages in Thanbyuzayat Township.

PART 5: LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Potential Avenues for Accountability and Justice

Given the clear violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, exploring potential ways to hold the military accountable for its actions is crucial.

1. International Criminal Court (ICC) Jurisdiction

The International Criminal Court (ICC) represents one of the most significant avenues for holding the military accountable. Although Burma is not a party to the Rome Statute, which established the ICC, the Court can still exercise jurisdiction over crimes committed by non-member states if they occur on the territory of a state party.

A precedent for this approach was set in 2019 when the ICC authorized an investigation into the deportation of the Rohingya people from Burma to Bangladesh, a state party to the Rome Statute. A similar jurisdictional argument could be made for the forced conscription of individuals who flee to neighboring countries that are ICC state parties.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) can also refer situations to the ICC, even for non-state parties. However, political challenges within the UNSC, particularly concerning veto powers, may complicate this process.

2. United Nations Fact-Finding Missions

Establishing United Nations Fact-Finding Missions represents another vital mechanism for documenting and addressing human rights violations. The UN has previously deployed such missions to Burma to investigate the atrocities committed against the Rohingya, and similar missions could be established to examine forced conscription and related abuses.

These findings can inform international legal action, guide policy decisions, and provide evidence for future prosecutions. These missions also play a critical role in keeping the international community informed about the situation in Burma.

TARGETED SANCTIONS AND DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE

Targeted sanctions against key figures within the military are a powerful tool for accountability. Many countries, including the United States and members of

the European Union, have already imposed sanctions in response to the coup and subsequent human rights violations. Expanding these sanctions to target those responsible for forced conscription specifically could increase pressure on the Junta to cease these practices.

Diplomatic pressure is also essential, mainly from Burma's neighbouring countries and regional organizations like ASEAN. While ASEAN has historically remained non-interfering, continued diplomatic engagement and pressure could push member states to take a stronger stand against the junta's actions.

SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights groups are indispensable in documenting abuses, supporting victims, and advocating for justice. The international community can support these organizations through funding, resources, and technical assistance, helping to enhance their capacity to monitor and report on forced conscription and other violations.

Supporting CSOs is crucial for building a robust civil society that can contribute to long-term peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. These organizations also play a key role in providing legal and psychological support to victims, ensuring their voices are heard in international forums.

LEGAL AND ADVOCACY SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS

Providing legal and advocacy support to victims of forced conscription is essential for achieving justice. This includes offering legal representation for those pursuing cases against the Junta and advocacy support to amplify their stories in the international community. Legal aid can be provided through international organizations, law firms specializing in human rights, and NGOs dedicated to justice for Burma.

Such efforts are crucial for ensuring that the victims of forced conscription receive the recognition and justice they deserve and that the perpetrators are held accountable under international law.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL NORMS

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REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The international community, including ASEAN, has failed to hold the junta accountable for its crimes. The five-point consensus agreed upon by ASEAN, which calls for constructive dialogue with the junta, is fundamentally flawed and void, as it conflicts with Burma's obligations under international law. Similarly, any agreements that fail to address accountability, including those between the National Unity Government (NUG) and EROs, lack the legal standing to tackle ongoing human rights violations.

The junta's unlawful enforcement of the People's Military Service Law (2010) is a clear and systematic effort to bolster its military ranks by exploiting vulnerable civilian populations. This enforcement breaches Burma's national laws and severely violates international humanitarian law. The military's actions meet the legal criteria for crimes against humanity, and the international community must take concrete steps to hold those responsible accountable.

PART 6: CONCLUSION

The forced conscription law enforced by the junta in Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region has led to widespread human rights violations, including forced recruitment, sexual violence, and the displacement of entire communities. The human rights situation in these regions remains dire, and there is an urgent need for continued documentation, advocacy, and international intervention to address these ongoing abuses.

The military has also targeted vulnerable populations, including orphans and those from impoverished families, who are less likely to resist recruitment. Forced recruitment has decimated communities, leaving behind a generation traumatized by the violence and repression they have experienced.

The case studies and testimonials from HURFOM's targeted documentation illustrate a distressing reality of life under the junta's conscription policies. The accounts of those affected add a personal touch to the statistics and reports, emphasizing the profound and enduring effects these policies have on individuals, families, and communities.

Further, it has led to far-reaching disruptions in the social structures of communities across Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region. The fabric of these communities, traditionally characterized by close-knit relationships and mutual support, has been severely frayed as a result of the junta's aggressive recruitment practices.

Efforts to achieve lasting peace in these regions will require addressing the root causes of the instability, including the human rights abuses perpetrated by the junta. This will involve holding those responsible for these abuses accountable and supporting the recovery and rehabilitation of affected communities.

Rebuilding trust, restoring social structures, and providing economic opportunities will be essential for achieving lasting stability and peace.

HURFOM continues documenting these cases, emphasizing the urgent need for international attention and intervention. Forced conscription and the deployment of unwilling civilians to conflict zones are gross violations of human rights and must be addressed to protect the lives and safety of those affected.

HURFOM calls on regional and global stakeholders to:

- 1. Demand an end to forced recruitment and the immediate release of all individuals who have been unlawfully conscripted.**
- 2. Targeted sanctions on officials responsible for enforcing the conscription law should be imposed.**
- 3. Support documentation efforts to collect and preserve evidence of forced recruitment, displacement, and other human rights abuses for future legal accountability.**

The ongoing conflict and systematic conscription of civilians demonstrate the urgent need for international intervention. Until concrete actions are taken, the people of Burma will continue to suffer under the unlawful practices of the junta, which must be stopped to protect the fundamental human rights of all citizens.

PART 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings presented in this report, the international community must take immediate and decisive action to address the human rights violations associated with forced conscription in Burma. The following calls to action are recommended:

1. To the International Community:

- Implement and enforce targeted sanctions against key figures in the Burmese military responsible for forced conscription.
- Support and fund the work of international and local human rights organizations that document abuses and assist victims.
- Facilitate access to international justice mechanisms, including the ICC, to prosecute those responsible for human rights violations

2. To ASEAN:

- Take a more assertive stance on the crisis in Burma by holding the junta accountable for its actions, including through diplomatic pressure and the suspension of privileges.
- Engage in dialogue with Burma's neighboring countries to ensure that refugees and displaced persons receive adequate protection and support.

3. To the National Unity Government:

- Increase efforts to garner support from ASEAN countries and other regional partners to end all support for the junta's Conscription effort.
- Position the NUG as a legitimate government committed to democratic values and the protection of ethnic minorities, including from forced conscription.
- Foster strong, unified alliances with ethnic armed organizations and civil society groups. Emphasize a commitment to federalism and respect for the rights of ethnic minorities in a future democratic Burma.

4. To Civil Society Organizations:

- Continue to document and report on the human rights violations associated with forced conscription, with a focus on gathering evidence that can be used in future legal proceedings.
- Strengthen networks and collaborations with international organizations to enhance the effectiveness of advocacy and support efforts.

5. To Human Rights Defenders and Advocates:

- This report documents evidence and findings that can be used to raise awareness and advocate for international action to address the ongoing crisis in Burma.
- Engage with international legal experts and institutions to explore avenues for holding the junta accountable for its actions under international law.

6. To Humanitarian Organizations:

- Prioritize the provision of humanitarian assistance to displaced populations affected by forced conscription, including those who have fled to neighboring countries.
- Work with local partners to ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable, including undocumented migrants and those in conflict-affected areas.



FORCED TO ENLIST
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A REPORT BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION OF MONLAND
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