

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

Human Rights Situation in Mon State, Karen State & Tanintharyi Region

MAY
2022



SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

Displacement on the Rise in Target Areas as the Burma Army Continues to Commit Human Rights Violations with Impunity

May 2022

For many civilians in Burma, their homes, once places of peace and refuge, have now become war zones. Inundated with a growing military junta presence, residents have fled to caves for safety and are regularly sheltering in make-shift bunkers. The situation is worsening daily as innocent people are left with limited options for their safety and protection. Ongoing calls to the international community are demanding action and consequences for the military junta who are guilty of failing to uphold basic human rights norms and principles. Their disregard for the law is evident in their raiding of villages, looting and extortion of civilians possessions and homes, as well as arbitrary arrest, torture, enforced disappearances and murder.

An environment of growing unrest has led to crippling instability across Burma. The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) has continued to monitor the situation across target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region. Worrying observations include an increase in forced internal displacement of approximately 8000 civilians in southeastern Burma, as well as a noticeable rise in bribery, forced portering and enforced

disappearances by the military junta. The early onslaught of the monsoon rains has only made everyday life more difficult for residents seeking refuge. Since mid-May 2022, internally displaced people (IDPs), living along the banks of the Thaung Yin River, south of Myawaddy, Karen State, have been facing food shortages due to incessant rains. An ethnic health worker who spoke to HURFOM said the rains had also soaked the tents and temporary huts of the IDPs, as well as their bags of rice at the resettlement sites along the shore. Households have been relocated with women, children and the elderly needing additional emergency assistance.

There are still significant challenges in ensuring the provision of humanitarian aid. The Burma Army has blocked key routes and are stationed at checkpoints along major intersections. Civilians passing through are regularly interrogated and are extorted for their funds and possessions. During the second week of May 2022, HURFOM recorded over 35 cases of motorcycles being confiscated in southern Mon State and northern Dawei. More than 50 cases of vehicles and truck owners were stopped and arrested without reason and forced to pay

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between 80,000 and 200,000 Myanmar kyats (43 USD and 108 USD) in Mon and Karen States as a ransom to be freed.

The regime has also shown blatant disregard for the property of local people. Land-grabs were reported in Mon State, despite fierce opposition from civilians. HURFOM learned that from May 20th to May 24th 2-22, the junta-run Land Record Department and the General Administration Department, installed approximately 18 landmarks without any prior informed consent from the landowners in Kyaik Roi and Pai-Kamar village, located in the proposed junta's airport project in Mudon, Mon State.

Another concern in May was the establishment of a new pro-military militia that has formed in many townships in HURFOM targeted areas. The soldiers are targeting activists, journalists, social workers, and members of political parties such as National League for Democracy (NLD) in gruesome murders. These attacks are intended to stroke fears and tensions. On May 2nd 2022, two pro-military men on a motorcycle came to the home of NLD representative Daw Shan Ma, aged 50. She was shot, and then the culprits fled. The week prior, two NLD members and supporters were killed in Long Lone Township, Dawei. Many believed that the junta-backed militia members committed

these murders. The group declared publicly that they had plans to also target members of the press, and their families.

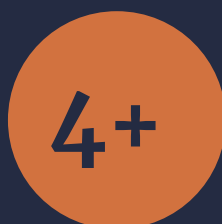
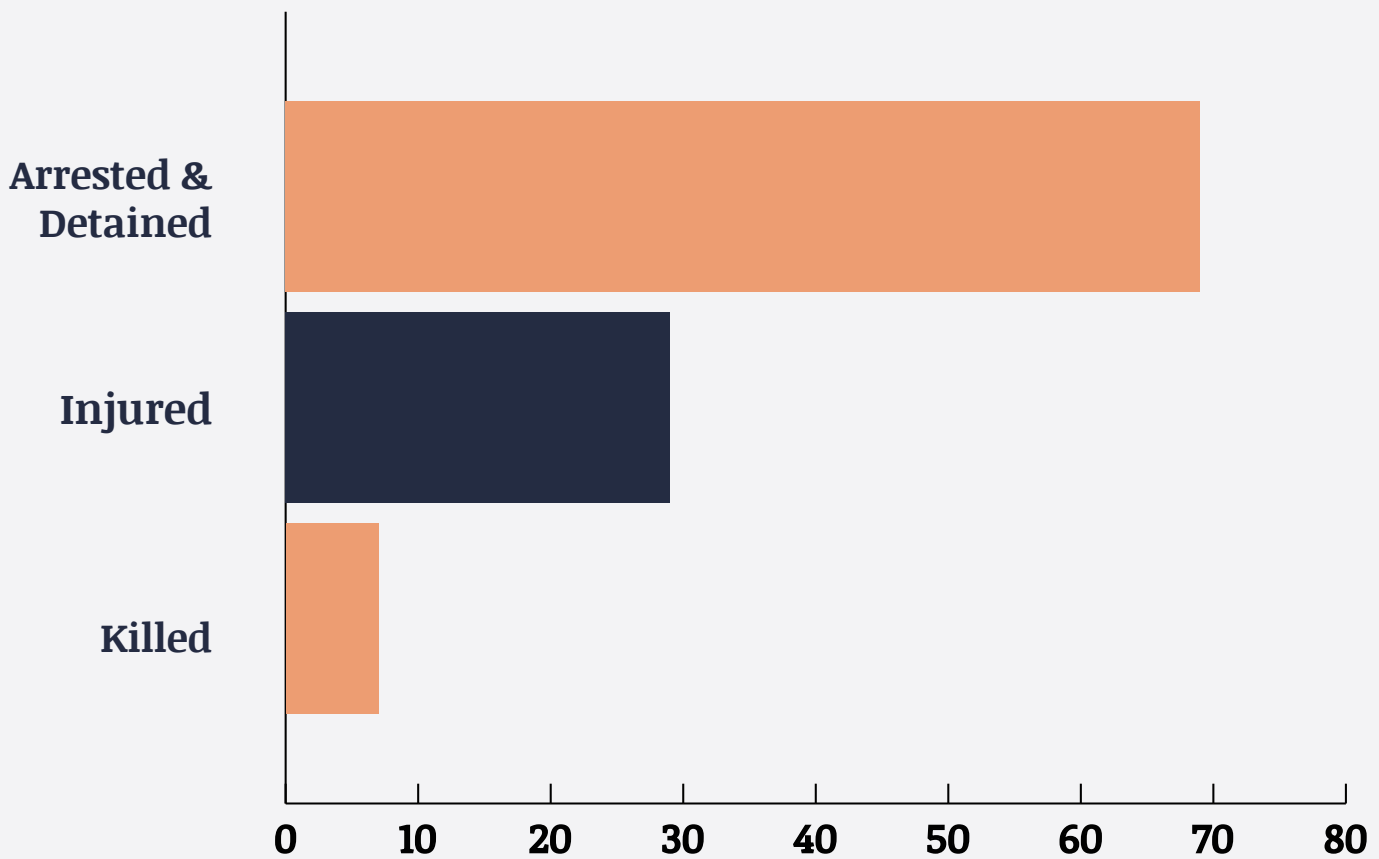
Amid all of the uncertainty and lack of clear path forward, the majority of people in HURFOM target areas are understandably unhappy and fearful. In Mon State, frustration is rampant as political groups including the Mon Unity Party and the New Mon State Party have both agreed to engage with the military junta as part of the so-called 'peace process.' The decision has resulted in a loss of trust among Mon Nations amid criticism shared on social media. The soldiers and Commanders of the military junta cannot be trusted to lead in any capacity.

Further, as the situation in Burma continues to unravel, the safety and security of civilians must take precedent. The grave human rights violations being committed are ongoing and yet, the military evades accountability. There must be concrete actions and steps forward which make clear that the military is not free to violate international human rights laws, rights and freedoms. HURFOM reinstates our calls for a referral of the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court, as well as for a global arms embargo and sanctions on aviation fuel.

SCALED UP HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

HURFOM fieldworkers continue to take great risks to document the human rights violations being perpetrated in target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region. By the end of May 2022, HURFOM recorded least **43 arrested, 26 detained, 29 injured and 7 killed.**

Civilians Arrested, Injured & Killed in May 2022 in Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region



Members of Parliament and their families targeted by the military junta.

16

PROTESTS ACROSS TARGET
AREAS IN MAY 2022

13

TANINTHARYI
REGION

2

MON STATE

1

KAREN STATE



27,080+

CIVILIANS DISPLACED ACROSS TARGET AREAS

CIVILIANS TARGETED IN MON, KAREN STATE
& TANINTHARYI REGION

59+

DISMISSED FOR
INVOLVEMENT
IN THE CIVIL
DISOBEDIENCE
MOVEMENT

5+

PROTESTERS/
ACTIVISTS
SENTENCED IN
JUNTA COURTS

7+

ENFORCED
DISAPPEARANCES
BY THE MILITARY



KAREN STATE

16,000+ Newly Displaced

14 Injured, 3 Killed



Mon State



Tanintharyi Region

Military offensives in Karen State, Burma continued to worsen. The junta deployed ‘surprise checks’ along frequented routes and showed no signs of relenting in their attacks against unarmed civilians. The Karen National Union (KNU) has issued several warnings to the junta to retreat and yet clashes are ongoing as the military ignores the demands of the armed group. Fighting has been unrelenting between the KNU’s armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and the Burma Army.

The situation worsened in Karen State following the KNU’s capture of a key military junta base on 28 April 2022. The regime responded with a series of air strikes, which led to at least 10 bombing missions over Day Bu Noh and Thay Ka Hta villages, Lu Thaw Township, Mutraw District, according to *Karen News*. Homes were damaged and although there were no casualties reported, the attacks served as a reminder of the great risks civilians face in their everyday lives as they are caught deep in a conflict they did ask for. Villagers abducted while trying to flee offensives have been taken hostage and used as porters with many of their conditions and well-being unknown.

More airstrikes in Karen State took place throughout the month as the junta continued to ignore warnings for the

soldiers to leave. Innocent villagers are hiding in caves for their own safety, especially as the Burma Army shows no signs of retreating and regularly occupies local areas. Many of the homes people temporarily fled have been broken into and raided. Livestock has also been repeatedly taken away and eaten by the soldiers. Rainy season has made movement for IDPs even more difficult as the terrain is wet, and muddy.

Residents in Hpa-An have said that their lives are in danger as the city faces a growing presence of state-backed plain clothed militants. The junta administration is driving more tensions by failing to ensure the safety of the local people and allowing its alliances to arm and commit daily human rights violations. Locals expressed frustration while speaking to HURFOM and demanded accountability as unofficial recruits continue to extort, threaten and intimidate civilians in the name of ‘security.’

And yet, despite the many threats civilians face, there is still momentum fueling the pro-democracy movement. Political prisoners in Hpa-An were among those who staged a hunger strike to voice their opposition to the military junta. Participating inmates were injured. The prison warden even opened

fire with a gun. According to further reports, the junta and special police forces arrived and beat people with sticks. Witnesses told HURFOM that the strike leaders: Ko Nay Lin Tun, Than Moe Min, Lwin Moe Htet, and the other four involved were handcuffed and dragged onto a bus. These incredible acts, even behind bars, make clear that the spirits of the people in Burma cannot be broken.

CASE STUDIES

18 May 2022, Kawkareik Township:

Local inhabitants reported that the junta indiscriminately attacked their village with several heavy artillery mortar shells and destroyed temples and civilian houses in Taung Kyar Inn village, Kawkareik Township, Karen State.

“They targeted us with several motor shells at around 3:00 PM. Some dropped inside the campus of the village monastery. A pagoda and two buildings were damaged,” A 50-year-old ethnic Karen villager of Taung Kyar Inn village, Kawkareik Township, Karen State confirmed. A HURFOM reporter said that at least 700 villagers fled from Taung Kyar Inn village due to the junta battalion’s indiscriminate artillery attacks.

29 May 2022, Win Yay Township:

A 33-year-old mother was killed and her 7-year-old daughter was wounded by the junta’s indiscriminate fire in Nang-Theik-Tun village, Win Yay township, Karen State. The troops had been based inside the police station compound in Khale-Tagun-Daing village since May 29th 2022. Mazin Oo, the victim, was cooking curry in the backyard when an artillery shell exploded near a banana grove behind her house. She was seriously injured on the left side of her head, and died on the spot.

Many villagers fled in fear during the attack to seek safer places. A senior Buddhist Abbot said 120 mm motor shells were still falling near the village monastery in Nng-Theik-Tun village, Win Yay township.



MON STATE

9000+ Newly Displaced

7 Injured, 2 Killed



Karen State



Tanintharyi Region

Clashes in Mon State have fueled displacement as the junta remains unrelenting in their offensives. Innocent people have been caught in the crossfire of violence, especially while trying to flee. The events taking place have made for a difficult month for villagers who spoke to HURFOM reporters with pleas for normalcy and an end to the fighting which has devastated their livelihoods.

On 3 May 2022 in the late afternoon, an armed clash between the local People's Defense Force (PDF) and the military junta took place between San Pya and Hnin Zone villages in Ye Township. During the fighting, a pregnant woman who had been visiting her family was killed. She was hiding and went to find water when she was shot in the head. Villagers were afraid to retrieve her body with concerns of also being fired at by the junta. The young victim was just 21-years old. The Burma Army was responsible for her death but refused to acknowledge it, nor offer any reparations for the family.

Since 1 February 2021, a number of armed groups have been active nearby Hnin Zone village. Some of them have extorted money and seized mobile phones from local rubber plantation workers, according to sources HURFOM spoke to.

Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances also persist in Mon State. According to family members, a civilian was arrested in Thaton Township and had been missing since he was arrested on May 17th 2022. Ko Zeyar Lin, aged 45, and a resident of Dae-Ba-Reim Village was arrested by the military backed forces without a warrant, and no explanation. The HURFOM Thaton Documentation team said the junta administration accused him of being a supporter of the local PDF active in Thaton areas.

Similarly, five youths between the ages of 20 to 25, residents of Kyar-Inn village, Mawlamyine Township, had been missing for several days. According to eyewitnesses, junta forces arrested them and forced them to be porters. Residents suspect that the young boys were taken to southern Kyaikmayaw Township, which borders Karen State. Pado Saw Soe Myint, the Chairman of the KNU Brigade 1 in Thaton District, confirmed that the junta and BGF arrested 100 local villagers, and forced them to be human shields and porters at Lay Kay Kaw Camp.

Members of pro-democracy parties are also regularly targeted and have their homes raided. If the person of interest is not home, or cannot be found, the junta targets their family members. On 14 May

2022, residents living in Yangyi Aung Ward, Ye Township, had their homes raided. At least five individuals were taken away at midnight. The men arbitrarily arrested were relatives of U Myo Win, a member of the National League for Democracy, and a Member of Parliament. He has been in hiding for almost a year.

In a related case, a source close to the family said Ko Thae Hein, a lawyer and a son of former Hluttaw Speaker Daw Tin Ei, was arbitrarily abducted by the junta special police on May 13th 2022 from his home and was taken to the Waekalae Detention Center in Thanbyuzayat, Mon State. After his arrest, the junta forces began to track about 40 contacts which were linked to Ko Thae Hein.

Along with abducting civilians, the military junta frequently loots civilian homes and steals their possessions, including motorcycles and mobile phones. The same behavior is repeated during military offensives when villagers flee. On May 21st 2022, Burma Army soldiers confiscated the properties of local people who left trying to reach safety when fighting between the junta began in Bilin Township.

Approximately 50 homes were destroyed, and the belongings of civilians were stolen. Four male villagers were injured due to the indiscriminate artillery attacks by the junta. Villages also

sustained damages, including destroyed homes and paddy containers. Due to the military offensive launched by the junta and the BGF, approximately 12, 000 locals fled to KNU Brigade No. 1 areas.

Emergency needs for medicine, food and shelter are growing daily, according to ethnic health responders and social workers who are active and operating in conflict zones. A 38-year-old villager who was forced to flee from Kaleik Tote village, Ye Township, with his five family members, said that they had been on the run since May 15 2022 as the junta troops intensified their offensives in his village. The majority of the IDPs in eastern Ye are women, elderly and children.

An ethnic health responder speaking to HURFOM warned of growing dengue fever cases, particularly among children. A Mon social worker who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons, also expressed concern at the lack of United Nations presence or action, and the disappointing lack of international intervention into the crisis across Burma, by stating: ***“They should know that the Burma military is the root cause of the current crisis.”***

Mon residents are also having to deal with the military junta’s ongoing seizure of land which the regime insists is for the construction of an airport. Villagers have been vocal in their opposition of the project, which would force rightful

civilian landowners to lose their plots of land, and most likely without compensation. These corrupt and unconscionable acts by the military junta speak to the lack of regard the Army holds for locals who have worked and owned their farms for generations. They rely on the land for their livelihoods, and for long-term sustainability.

Fishermen have also been threatened by foreign investment in Mon State. Locals at the Mawlamyine Cement Factory fear new operations will bring disaster to their community and livelihoods. The company stopped its operations on June 1, 2020, but according to residents, there are plans to reopen. Due to the impact of the ships frequently traveling on the river, houses on the riverbank have suffered damage, including serious cracks in walls. Some houses have collapsed. The ecosystem of the river has also been seriously affected by the ship traffic. The harvesting tools of local fishermen have also been ruined and a local woman died from a river accident.

The events which took place throughout May in Mon State once again make clear that the military junta cannot be trusted. Their pursuits for power have attempted to paralyze a population refusing to submit to their authoritarian policies and thirst for a dictatorship.

CASE STUDIES

11 May 2022, Thaton Township

Pado Saw Soe Myint, chairman of the KNU Brigade #1 in Thaton District, confirmed that the army and the Border Guard Force arrested approximately 100 local villagers as human shields and porters at the Lay Kay camp in Mon State, Beelin Township. Due to tensions between the Karen National Liberation Army, Brigade 1 and the joint forces of junta and BGF, more than 10,000 local people in Beelin Township have been forced to flee.

20 May 2022, Nyaung Gone village, Mudon Township

The military junta seized plots of land in Nyaung Gone village, Mudon Township, in Mon State, claiming the land was needed for the construction of an airport. Residents say the land grabbing will be the contentious issue of large-scale land acquisitions for the junta's reported state development project - which would include the removal of 18 homes.



Tanintharyi region

6500+ Newly Displaced

8 Injured, 2 Killed



Karen State



Mon State

Devastated by indiscriminate firing and assault, civilians in Tanintharyi region have been forced to bear a burden of uncertainty as the junta's presence looms.

On May 4th 2022, residents from Pakari village reported that some of the homes in their village were struck by shelling by the junta around midnight.

Approximately 400 villagers were forced to flee their homes. A villager who escaped told HURFOM: ***“The troops fired four artillery shells at the same time. Three dropped and exploded near my house. My neighbor’s house was damaged, but no one was injured.***

There are about ten homes that were struck.” The village is located east of Dawei. Due to ongoing conflicts between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), local People's Defense Forces, and the junta, more than 1,000 locals have already fled their native homes. The number of civilians injured in the unrelenting attacks is constantly rising.

On May 10th 2022 at 4PM, more indiscriminate firing led to shells destroying a Buddhist monastery in Kyauk Mae Taung village, Metta township. The attack left a senior monk wounded, and one 40-year old man dead. Again on May 18th 2022, approximately 50 military council troops entered

Thatkaw village, Laung Lone township, after the local opposition group attacked the Tha-Kyet-Taw police station on 5 May 2022. Two women were beaten in the attack which forced most of the village to flee.

Civilians are being targeted and even shot at indiscriminately. A resident of Thapyaezoon village in Yebyu Township, was shot and killed by armed men in military uniforms. Five plainclothes troops with guns ran out of the military truck. Neighbors shouted when the five men surrounded the victim's house and who said they heard the sounds of gunfire and later confirmed that a young man was shot and killed. The junta troops also confiscated the deceased's cell phone and loaded his motorcycle into the military truck. A villager who spoke to HURFOM remarked: ***“No one is safe right now in my home village. I also dare not to sleep at home at night. I have to frequently move for security.”***

Even children have been targeted. On May 20th 2022, a 10 year old boy was shot dead by the junta's in Taku village in Tanintharyi Township, according to front-line emergency response volunteers who witnessed the incident. Both victims died on the spot. People from the same village as the boy said he had a mental illness and was shot in the

back while running, fearful and trying to escape. Another male villager, aged 50, was shot and killed. In Taku village and Thein-Daw village, Mergue District, about fifteen villagers were arrested during the attack. Some were forced to carry loads as porters.

As HURFOM reported in April 2022, Tanintharyi region is ambushed with more and more civilians being arbitrarily arrested and detained. Between the 7th and 10th of May 2022, up to three men had been arrested by the junta at their homes. On May 7th 2022, at 7:30 AM, two residents, Ko Po Thar Htoo and Ko Aung Myo, were arrested by junta forces without arrest warrants at their homes located in Ta Laing Ma Ward. Then, around 8 AM on May 9th 2022, a group of junta troops in plainclothes raided a house on Kyaung Road in Oo Lauk Ward and arrested another young man. A witness said, ***“it seems like these indiscriminate arrests are directly linked with the current conflict.”***

Once again, despite the grave brutality the junta evokes with their presence across Tanintharyi region, young activists and local human rights defenders have been distributing pamphlets in downtown areas, markets and bus stations which call for an end to the military junta. On May 10th 2022, in Launglone Township, hundreds of protesters demonstrated against the military dictatorship to show their defiance.

CASE STUDIES

18 May 2022: Laung Lone Township

Villagers in Laung Lone Township said that the military forces from Light Infantry Battalion No.403 and 404 based in Thatkaw village had their homes broken into. Two local women were severely beaten. One woman had 300,000 Kyats stolen from her home who later fled her village.

19 May 2022: Laung Lone Township

Ko Zin Ko, age 23, a resident of Hin Cho Taw Village, Laung Lone Township, Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region, was illegally arrested by the junta forces at 7:30 AM.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Land confiscation and environmental degradation by the military junta through their proposed development projects strip local civilians of their land rights and property.
2. The ongoing arrest of prominent pro-democracy politicians and human rights defenders who have used their platform to advocate for dismantling the military junta continues. These individuals have warrants issued for their arrest and have been forced into exile.
3. Indiscriminate firing and shelling into civilian areas continued to worsen the humanitarian crisis along the Thai - Burma border as the number of IDPs increased. The early onslaught of the monsoon rains presented an additional barrier for people attempting to flee.
4. The junta-appointed Health Director began investigating whether medical doctors affiliated with the Civil Disobedience Movement were working in labs not controlled by the junta in Mon State. The investigation was led by the military state health director in yet another act of unlawful and illegal surveillance by the junta.
5. Motorcycles, mobile devices and money are regularly confiscated and extorted from civilians at checkpoints stationed by the junta deliberately along key-routes.
6. Tensions between the military junta and the various People's Defense Forces have fledge a full-blown humanitarian crisis and forced thousands of innocent civilians to flee.
7. Military impunity remains deeply ingrained into the institutions representing the Tatmadaw, which only emboldens the junta to continue perpetrating human rights violations.
8. The rise of plain-clothes 'security' officers are backed by the military junta and have been using intimidation tactics and threats to extort civilians out of money, and their possessions. Cases have been reported across HURFOM's main target areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A referral of the situation on the ground in Burma made immediately by the United Nations Security Council to the International Criminal Court.
2. Concerted and coordinated action by global actors for an urgently mandated global arms embargo which would prevent the free flow of weapons into the hands of the murderous junta.
3. Aviation fuel sanctions to put an effective end to the airstrikes in Burma which have contributed to significant loss of life, particularly among innocent civilians.
4. Targeted sanctions on military junta officials, as well as their families, which puts holds on their financial assets and possessions and undercuts their ability to do corrupt business dealings abroad.
5. Strengthened and renewed protection mechanisms which grant civilians who are vulnerable and at risk of assault in a position where they are able to access justice referral and accountability pathways.
6. Renewed and continued funding support for local organizations responding to the needs of their communities on the ground. Cross-border aid pathways must be accessed and all humanitarian aid in the hands of local actors.
7. Foreign investors in Burma must immediately cease their operations and withdraw their involvement from all development projects in the country, including but not limited to airports, seaports and cement businesses.

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