

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

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

JANUARY
2023



Airstrikes in Southeastern Burma Kill and Injure Civilians While Forcing Thousands to Flee as the Burma Army Prepares for their Sham 2023 Elections

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The first month of the year in Southeastern Burma and country-wide proved equally disastrous as those prior. Despite the multiple calls to the international community for action as the junta commits endless atrocities, they seemed to fall upon deaf ears. Across January 2023, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) documented dozens more malicious attacks against civilians. While these crimes are occurring, the regime is shamelessly continuing with their plans to hold 'elections' later this year. HURFOM fieldworkers reported on early cases of civilians already being bribed to vote for the military.

The Mon State Junta Administration General Administration Department (GAD) has been conducting several meetings in each township in Mon State for all levels of Administrators to operate an accurate census and prepare for the upcoming junta-run election:

“They seem like they are preparing for the election. The Mon State junta is conducting election-related activities such as instructing each level of GAD staff to collect the numbers of the population in the whole state and training the polling station officers

to hold the General Election,” said a source close to HURFOM.

On the other hand, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party members are tasked by the junta to obtain the entire population of households in each ward, village, and township. The people know these elections are not credible, yet they are threatened with their lives if they do not comply with military orders. The election plans are another malicious attempt by the junta to make Burma appear like a country that has returned to normalcy in the days since the coup. The junta has targeted opposition forces and pro-democracy proponents and, once in junta custody, are tortured and killed. Defacto Head of State, Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint have been detained on baseless charges since 1 February 2021. Each faces up to several decades in prison - effectively life sentences.

Exiled opposition members who remain on the run are also at risk of persecution. Local witnesses reported on the evening of January 12 the junta and their backed-militia forces burned five homes of National League for Democracy supporters in Long Lon Township Dawei. A 64-year-old woman

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

JANUARY 2023

was also shot dead, according to witnesses. When they entered to burn the houses, about 30 residents were arrested and ordered to follow the troops to the temporary military camp, and their phones were taken and checked. Some of them who could afford to pay the ransom demanded to return home. In addition, six motorcycles and about 350 baskets of rice were destroyed in the fire, in yet another illegal and demoralizing act by the junta.

In a related case, eight people, including an NLD party's regional Officer of the Information Department, Dawei, were abducted by the Junta Intelligent Bureau Officers and security forces on January 2, 2023, according to their friends and families. On January 2, 2023, at 10:30 AM, the junta raided the residence of Ko Win Lwin and Ma Mya Yadanar Htet, located in Kyet-Sar-Pyin Ward, Dawei. According to family members, they grabbed both of them without any arrest warrants. Ma Mya Yadanar Htet served as a Regional Information Officer of the NLD Party in the areas for many years.

“After the arrests of this couple, the junta and Intelligence officers continued raiding the houses of another seven suspected people in the same location. Most likely, they were accused of supporting the current underground revolution in Dawei and other townships in Tanintharyi Region. The junta

often targets those who have been active in politics before,” one of the locals presumed.

Throughout the month, HURFOM also observed a worrying increase in violence against women. On the morning of 1 January, two young women riding a motorcycle were shot in the back by the junta forces patrolling the area. The two victims were both severely injured. Local social response team members took them to Mawlamyine Hospital. One of the victims is a nurse, and the other is from a village in New Mon State Party Controlled areas.

In a separate case involving attacks against women, Burma Army arrested several young women, including four from Ye township and six from Abaw village and Kyar-tan village, Mon State. They were tortured and examined at a military training camp. Presently, HURFOM reporters from the area confirmed that the junta forces jailed four women detainees out of 10. The victim's family members have appealed for the truth and justice to emerge. The junta's treatment of women is entrenched in decades of patriarchal rule and institutions which discriminate heavily based on gender.

Fighting across Southeastern Burma has seriously threatened the safety and security of civilians. Daily horrors are perpetrated against unarmed people as the junta

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

JANUARY 2023

attempts to cement its rule. Nationwide over one million are displaced. In Karen State, most villagers who fled because of a three-week intensifying conflict in southern Kyainnseikyi areas have not been able to return to their homes. According to a service provider member operating in the regions, they still need humanitarian assistance. Fierce fighting broke out between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) coalition forces and the junta in eight villages of Kyainnseikyi Township. The Burma Army carried out a series of airstrikes on the villages, driving 3,000 residents to flee to safety in the Karen National Union-controlled areas.

“Most people are worried about returning to their original places because the junta has expanded its military force and is active in Kyainnseikyi Township,” a 40-year-old KNLA member described the situation.

In Dawei, newly displaced people who fled their homes due to renewed fighting reported that houses in Wakone village Dawei have been burning since 8 January 2023. The junta is continuing to burn homes and threatening people to leave. The troops entered the village around 6 AM, and a few minutes later, smoke billowed up from the town”, according to house owners who

escaped clashes. At least twenty houses were destroyed. Currently, the junta is patrolling Dawei East Village. More than 800 locals have already fled.

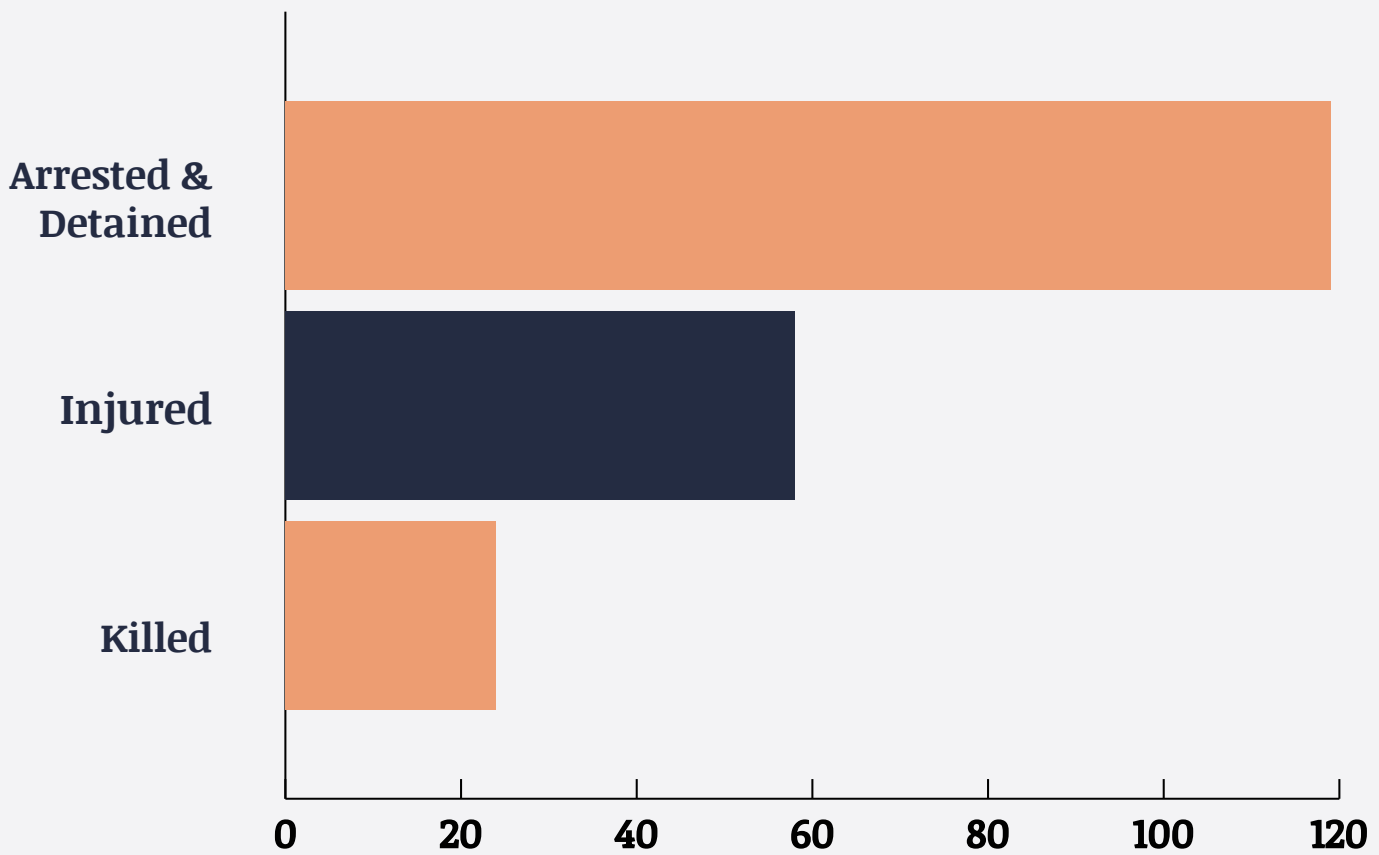
The military junta continues to commit atrocity crimes because of the ongoing lack of accountability and consequences. The international community has failed to challenge the junta’s dictatorship while effectively underestimating its ability to devastate the country’s affairs to preserve its best interests. Thousands of lives have been lost because of the regime’s quest to dispel opposition forces by all means. Innocent civilians have been caught in the crossfire while trying to find safety. Their lives have been forcibly put on hold as the military pursues its violent agenda.

The people of Burma have longed for justice and accountability for decades. The international community must respond to the multiple crises inside the country which have devastated prospects for genuine and meaningful peace. Further, global actors must recognize that the Burmese military commits human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity against civilians with total impunity.

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 **January 2023**, HURFOM recorded **least 71 arrested, 48 detained, 58 injured and 24 killed.**

Civilians Arrested, Injured & Killed in January 2023 in Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region



8

Pro-Democracy Activists targeted by the junta as well as 1 NLD member, and 1 Strike Committee Member

12

PROTESTS ACROSS TARGET
AREAS IN JANUARY 2023

10

TANINTHARYI
REGION

1

MON STATE

1

KAREN STATE



24,700+

CIVILIANS DISPLACED ACROSS TARGET AREAS

CIVILIANS TARGETED IN MON, KAREN STATE
& TANINTHARYI REGION

15+

DISMISSED FOR
INVOLVEMENT
IN THE CIVIL
DISOBEDIENCE
MOVEMENT

6+

PROTESTERS/
ACTIVISTS
SENTENCED IN
JUNTA COURTS

9+

ENFORCED
DISAPPEARANCES
BY THE MILITARY



KAREN STATE

13,100+ Newly Displaced

22 Injured, 9 Killed



Mon State



Tanintharyi Region

Due to the recent increasing armed clashes in southern Karen, according to a service provider group on the ground, more than 1,000 families of south Kyainnseikyi Township Karen State have fled from their homes between 3 and 6 January. Further, emergency response team members said they still face difficulty treating patients injured in the conflict areas in Kawkareik Township, Karen State. Since December 26, at least seven villagers, including four Buddhist monks and a monastery boy, got hit and injured when the junta troops opened fire in this area. They need immediate treatment and advanced therapy because the wounds they received were critical.

The junta's artillery shells launched on December 27 killed two residents, including a monk, and injured three monks and a 12-year-old monastery boy. In addition, at least 15 elderly and some children fleeing during the conflict need emergency health care: "There is still an agitated situation in this area. The junta's surprise air attacks and artillery shells persist day and night. The armed conflicts are going on, and we need food to survive because people cannot work."

"The Burmese Army's jet fighters and surprise artillery attacks are terrifying. You cannot indicate when and how you will be attacked. I couldn't sleep or eat for almost a week ago of great anxiety. There are children and old people in my family," said a local 45-year-old widow from Taung Zon village.

Sources from Emergency Response Team in the area said military aircraft are flying over the villages every day, even at midnight, and villagers are digging bomb shelters to protect themselves from air assaults and artillery attacks.

The junta deployed airstrikes that killed five innocent Karen villagers, including a child and two pastors, in KNU-controlled areas

of Lay Wah village, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, Karen Territory, according to the local witnesses. A child almost three years old and his mother, a Baptist Pastor, a Catholic religious figure, and a villager died on the spot.

It was reported that at least seven civilians were injured due to the brutal air attacks, and an estimated 80 households near Laywah village fled. These were not indiscriminate attacks. They intentionally targeted the church and the place where the people lived. Their tactics are targeting more innocent people now,” a young villager described the attacks of January 12.

A week-long armed clash between the junta forces and the joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army and People’s Defense Forces in Taung Zun village of Kyarinnseikyi Township, Karen State, led to the deaths of at least 14 local innocent civilians. Thousands have fled their homes:

“It has been eight days since the fighting began. The junta operated under the Southeast Command, and they launched artillery attacks and air assaults resulting in the death of many innocent villagers. The junta is the sole perpetrator. They must be accountable,” said a local.

Another reported on the incident, saying, “The Karen villagers were on one side of the river, and the junta on the other. On January 5, 2023, I saw an artillery attack hitting the village. Many people were injured and died on the spot. The victims included the elderly and women.”

On 17 January, at least 1,200 more Karen and Mon residents from Kyainnseikyi fled their homes due to increasing armed clashes and offensive by the junta forces in eastern Zami River, Kyainnseikyi Township, Kawkareik District, Karen State and from New Mon State Party mixed territory. The IDPs took temporary shelter in Mon villages in the West Zami River. Artillery shells and bombs were directly dropped onto villages. There were reports of injuries and fatalities of at least eight people. Armed clashes have happened nearly every day in the East River.

By 25 January 2023, approximately 400 families in Kyone Dow, Kanni, Thayettaw and Kaw Kyaik villages, Kawkareik, had to flee to safer areas due to the indiscriminate firing of the junta's heavy weapons into the villages. Many residents said the situation was intolerable as the LIB 545 and 546 armed forces fired heavy weapons into their villages.

“Artillery shells dropped near my residence three times, and there was no time to collect anything. My husband managed to move the children. We started running away. It's challenging because we left all food and things in my village. Meanwhile, the monastery is helping. In the long run, if we can't go home, it will be difficult to survive and live,” a 37-year-old mother of 3 children said of the tense situation.

There are 800 houses in Tharataw Village. A total of 4,000 people live there. A network fieldwork team explained that it is difficult to collect a needs assessment because everyone is fleeing. Food and shelter are the primary needs of new IDPs.

A 14-year-old girl was killed and at least four local civilians injured after the junta forces from Infantry Battalions 545 conducted indiscriminate firing at the villages in Kyone Doe areas, Kawkareik, according to the emergency response group in the region. Villagers reported that at least eight houses were destroyed at the top of Naunthala village in the south of Kawkareik due to the random firing at night, which led a grandfather and a child to be injured.

Most of the village population fled; however, a few could not leave their homes. Most of the remaining residents lived in fear because the shooting with artillery weapons happened almost every night. Villagers from Mi Ga Lon, Ywa Kalay, Kaw Hto Kee, Kyauk Phyar, Kalar Kyauk Phyar, Kaw Kyaik, Myay Ni Gone, Kyaik Zin, and Kaw Pauk Migalon, located around Kyon Doe Township had to leave their homes and flee to safety due to artillery gunfire.



MON STATE

2,070+ Newly Displaced

11 Injured, 5 Killed



Karen State



Tanintharyi Region

The beginning of the month was met with attacks against civilians in Mon State, which continued throughout January. Following a bomb blast on 3 January 2023, four civilians were abducted by the junta. Officers without any arrest warrants or evidence raided houses and accused the owners of detonating a bomb that had exploded in the area. The detainees are all men; three are from Kyone-Kadat village, and one is a guest. They were detained at Thanphyuzara Police Station and could not make any contact with their families.

Witnesses confirmed that junta battalions continued to fire indiscriminate mortar shells. Two villagers were injured on January 6 in Thein Zayat Town, Mon State: “They were hit by artillery around 8 AM. The Infantry Battalion IB No. 207 fired at least ten heavy weapons into our village,” said a 30-year-old male villager.

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group in the region. Villagers reported that at least eight houses were destroyed at the top of Naunthala village in the south of Kawkareik due to the random firing at night, which injured a grandfather and a child.


In addition, increased abuse of surveillance technology by the military junta targets civilians, civil society organizations, and those involved in anti-coup movements. Beginning in January 2023, the Mon backed-junta renovated most of its surveillance systems and intercept tools to conduct more control of telecommunications providers in these areas.

“We noted that all telecommunications providers (including Atom, MPT, MyTel, and Ooredoo) operating in the country would be directly controlled by the junta technology team in each Internet Service Provider (ISP). The way the ISPs monitor is using frequently activated surveillance technology. They believe China and other regional pro-junta governments and tech companies back these tools and systems. These tools can intercept and watchdog within their networks, sub-networks, and each communication tower. So, It seems very risky to use their data plan and service,” according to an unnamed

Freedom of Expression Activist who is still actively working in Mon State.

Extortion and the blatant lawlessness of the junta are ongoing. Grocery stores in front of the Mya-Thein-Tan Buddhist Monastery, Kyaik-Hto, were ordered to be removed by the Junta-backed Municipal Department for allegedly ‘trespassing,’ according to a 55-year-old, a Grocery store owner, from Kyaik Hto Township, Mon State. On January 8, the source told HURFOM that the owners of the stalls were invited to the Kyaik Hto Municipal Office and ordered to remove their stores by the third week of January 2023:

“We have been running this business for almost 15 years. My family legally purchased the shop in 2010. Throughout the store’s opening, we have been paying taxes requested by successive governments. But now, we are accused of being trespassers, and our shops were destroyed,” said an anonymous source who added the experience has been “excruciating.”



“Now, we are accused of being trespassers, and our shops were destroyed.”



Tanintharyi region

9500+ Newly Displaced

25 Injured, 10 Killed



Karen State



Mon State

In the Tanintharyi region, violence remains fierce. Human rights violations are rampant, and local villagers' extortion and torturing have constantly resulted in fear and instability.

Local villagers reported that three people from their village, Winkaphaw, were abducted by a military column of soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 403 in early January 2023. They have not yet been released and are being interrogated at the military camp in the area. The three detained villagers from Winka Phoe who were arbitrarily arrested near the monastery of the village are Ko Naung, age 27, Ko Naing Zaw Linn, age 30, and Ko Mae Doe, age 38, from Nyaung Zin village, Thayetchaung, Dawei. Their family members allege that they were arrested based on false information and are innocent with no connection to any armed groups. It was reported that two more villagers were arrested by the same battalion in the previous days and only freed after the troops received a ransom.

The junta still targets supporters of the revolution and the National League for Democracy. The Dawei junta arbitrarily abducted at least four people, including a 17-year-old girl and young civilians, by accusing them of supporting the Civil

Disobedience Movement and the National Unity Government (NUG) in Dawei. One detainee's home was also confiscated. The General Administrative Department sealed off the area to search for more civilians.

Several days before this, a young man named Ko Maung Lay from Kyet Sar Pyin Ward Dawei was arrested. Later on, Ma Yin Cho, the west Ward resident, was also abducted, and the secret police forces arrested her family members who lived on the same street. The secret police forces also arrested Ma Yin Cho's brother Ko Thar Htoo. They accused him of being associated with the NUG, according to a source close to the family. Yet again, on January 14, the junta sealed off the home of Ko Thet Toe Aung, with ties to the National League for Democracy (NLD) and participated in the anti-dictatorship protests in Dawei.

The attacks against opposition groups are calculated and targeted. In Bote Pyin Township, Kaw Thaung District, Southern Tanintharyi Region, local witnesses reported that the bodies of eight men, including three members of Administrative village members appointed by the former NLD, were found in Ywa-Hae-Luu, Kaw Thaung District.

“All eight bodies were found dumped on the side of the road. We guess they were left since January 15. Such shocking scenery to see a mass of people being slaughtered. I feel more and more that no one is safe now. Until now, the perpetrators have not been identified,” a 35-year-old male villager said.

The villagers close to the victims’ families told HURFOM they were identified on January 13. They were taken to a meeting in two trucks and then found killed. This is the first time since the coup that up to eight men were killed in a mass killing in Bote Pyin Township.

The junta’s violent assaults have not spared the elderly. A 60-year-old resident of Pala, who has been missing since January 12, was confirmed shot and killed by the junta in the southern Tanintharyi Region. His motorcycle was also confiscated. U Loon Khin had been missing since the evening of January 12. The family said he left for a job and never returned: “We received his news three days ago that he was arrested and shot to death by soldiers while coming home,” said a family member who added his body was taken away.

HURFOM reported that approximately eight people, including U Loon Khin, were shot dead in Pala Town in 12 months. No one has received justice.

The number of those arrested continues to rise. At least five local civilians have been arbitrarily abducted by the secret police and military intelligence forces between 19 and 23 January 2023, in Thayet Chaung Township Dawei, according to families and friends of the detainees. On 20 January, police stopped a minibus with 14 passengers and grabbed supporters of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Inflation across all target areas has had a devastating toll on civilians who cannot meet their basic needs.
2. There has been a noticeable uptick in violence against women, including beating a pregnant woman and ongoing detainment of young women who face beatings in junta custody.
3. Residents reported that they were forced to take sentry duty by the junta in Kyaik Hto, Mon State and had to pay duty fees for those absent from guarding.
4. Clashes have led to forced internal displacement in Burma as instability and tensions move people from their homes.
5. Police and junta-backed militias continue to initiate door-to-door checks and arrest those on their wanted lists.
6. Concerns have spread as the military junta begins to make decisions that would bar competing democratic parties from the next election in Burma. The military junta has been trying to change/manipulate the numbers of constituencies.
7. Motorcycles, mobile devices, and money are confiscated and extorted from civilians at checkpoints stationed by the junta deliberately along critical routes. Civilians are forced to pay excessive bribes to retrieve their possessions. However, very few were able to afford the high costs.
8. Torture remains rampant in Burma and across target areas where innocent civilians are subjected to gruelling, horrifying acts by the junta to extract information.
9. The international community, including UN bodies and ASEAN, is not responding swiftly enough to the situation in Burma, which demands urgent attention and consequences for the junta.
10. Military impunity remains deeply ingrained in the institutions representing the Tatmadaw, which only encourages the junta to continue perpetrating human rights violations.
11. Children are targeted by the military junta and deprived of basic needs, including medical attention, food, education, and the right to live safely.
12. The arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention by the junta are ongoing, as are warrantless raids and indiscriminate firing into civilian areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A referral of the situation on the ground in Burma is to be 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 and their families and holds on their financial assets and possessions undercut their ability to conduct corrupt business dealings abroad.
5. Strengthened and renewed protection mechanisms grant civilians who are vulnerable and at risk of assault a position where they can 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. Crossborder 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.
8. An abrupt and immediate halt to the use of torture by the military junta, and further, we call for investigations to probe the unlawful deaths of civilians in Burma who have been tortured to death, as well as those who have been forced to endure trauma and long-term injuries as a result.

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