

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

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

MAY
2023



Cyclone Mocha Devastates Livelihoods as Junta Continues Their Attacks Against Civilians

MAY 2023

In the wake of Cyclone Mocha, civilians in Burma braced for the worst as the powerful storm threatened lives and caused widespread destruction. While local emergency response teams worked to put preventative measures and safety protocols in place, the military junta continued to bombard civilians with air and ground attacks. Their immense suffering, even in the wake of a natural disaster, did not deter the regime from their attacks.

The cyclone has affected the whole region, and yet days into the first week of May, the military junta deployed a series of targeted airstrikes on civilians in Southeastern Burma. A joint statement with the Karen Human Rights Group and the Karen Peace Support Network condemned attacks on 10 May by soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #599 under Military Operations Command (MOC) #13, together with other junta-backed infantry divisions and battalions. The attacks killed nearly 20 people, including several children.

Between 7 and 14 May 2023, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) reported that the military was responsible for carrying out three airstrikes which bombed six villages in Ye Township, Mon State, on May 7, 8, and May 14 in western Dawei. These attacks led 1200 to 1500

residents to flee their homes as displacement continued to be fueled by the relentless raids and assaults by the regime. During this period, in Kyaukgyi Township (areas controlled by the KNU – the Karen National Union), more than fifty civilian homes were also destroyed by the junta, including a religious building and a school.

Residents have also continued to face abuse and threats by junta-supported administrators. Since the regime reformed its gun laws and made it more accessible to purchase and use weapons, many Administrators in Mudon Township bought guns from the black market.

“They threaten villagers with their guns,” said a villager.

The junta-backed Ministry of the Interior issued the order to revive the 1977 law allowing ‘loyal’ civilians to bear arms on January 31, 2023, a day before the second anniversary of the attempted coup. Since then, Mon State administrators have obtained guns. To access and own a weapon, any individual must make an application and need final approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Still, Administrators in Mudon Township have been able to get them quickly.

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

MAY 2023

Guns obtained from the black market are illegal, but Administrators are pro-military, and critics of the policy note that the military overlooks their misconduct. This could lead to many other problems related to the misuse of these weapons, and we are worrying about the life and properties of the people. On the other hand, it also means that if ordered, these armed people must cooperate in junta operations against the resistance, according to Mudon villagers.

Extortion and bribery persist as the junta targets key routes to illicit funds from ordinary people. The military increased the operation of thirty-seven checkpoints along the Tanintharyi Highway and has been committing illegal taxation and extortion against travellers and vehicle drivers, according to those regularly using this 180-mile-long motor highway.

HURFOM fieldworkers were able to speak with various locals and reliable sources. All believed that these were the results of the permission of the central junta administration to their security troops to utilize policies due to inadequate support from the State/Region levels to their security forces:

“It is as if they can earn their daily incomes at the bottom level. This means more extortion, illegal levying of taxes,

arbitrary arrests, and demanding ransom. As you know, we could only earn a maximum of 12.000 MMK a day, but we are forced to pay various illegal taxes, sometimes extorted money or properties, and unjust taxation. So, imagine how much cash we left in our hands to feed my family?” A 50-year-old mini truck driver from Ye, Mon State, stated.

“Even the daily road users, such as local farmers, rubber plantation workers, and even local inhabitants, are suffering,” a 30-year-old Tavoyan rubber plantation farmer from a village in Yebyu Township told reporters, adding, “We have to encounter thieves and criminals in our daily life while crossing their checkpoints and security gates.”

From Mahlawe Taung tollgate, Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region, to Myeik Township, Southern Region, travellers estimated that various junta forces had operated more than thirty-seven checkpoints and tollgates along the 180 miles long highway.

“Before the coup, there were only seven tollgates for road taxes. Since then, the regime has occupied all these tollgates for security reasons and added another thirty tollgates and checkpoints along the road to the Southern Region,” a truck driver who has

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

MAY 2023

to use this highway daily said.

“The military will justify their checkpoints for ‘security’ reasons. However, behind the scenes, the daily income is not even used to support their military families. Significant top-down corruption exists here,” a former Civil Servant from Myeik Township expressed his view on May 1.

In addition, the junta’s arrest and detainment of innocent people is ongoing. Those who stand firm in their beliefs and pro-democracy opinions are being targeted. Three people were arrested the first week of May, including a young man on May 4. These young people were abducted for their views shared on social media, including their condemnation of the extrajudicial killings committed by the junta.

“The latest arrest case occurred in the early morning of May 4, 2023,” a neighbour told HURFOM. A group of plainclothes police and military intelligence officers surrounded the house of Ko Paing Thu, a young resident of Phet-Kalate village, Kyaik Hto Township, Mon State, whom the junta forces have arrested for commenting to condemn the military’s inhumane mass killings.

Two related incidents occurred after civilians were abducted for condemning atrocities committed by the regime. The Administration Department detained and

charged all three young men in Kyaik Hto Township.

“Two of them were accused of being associated with the People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) after the junta troops inspected their mobile phones,” a reliable source close to the police said.

“My son is innocent, living and working in the welding metals workshop in the family business. We will try to face this case legally,” the father of Paing Thu told the reporter.

Recently, the junta’s intelligence network has been monitoring youth activist accounts like Paing Thu’s Facebook since the beginning of this year and has conducted in-depth surveillance systems across the State. Anyone caught commenting or writing about the National Unity Government (NUG) or news related to the pro-democracy movement is tracked by the well-trained technology groups financed and supported by the junta, according to a staff of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mon State.

HURFOM also reported aid workers having their rights violated by the junta. The military is weaponizing aid delivery. More than forty civilians, including members of

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

MAY 2023

charity service volunteers, were abducted and interrogated by the junta in Kawkareik township, Karen State.

HURFOM's field report stated that forty-two people had been abducted between 9 and 11 May. The detainees were members of the free funeral service, rescue ambulance charity members, former schoolteachers, and ordinary civilians, including former civil servants in Kawkareik.

“Yes, I can confirm all arrests. As far as I know, social workers are based in Kawkareik township. They are now being held in a military interrogation center,” said a family spokesperson.

“For a long time, the administrative council wanted to blame social charity service members and social relief groups for their operations. Now they are targeting them directly,” said a former social group member, referring to the pressure on social workers by the junta council.

“I heard they came to arrest with detailed wanted lists and profiles. This must be the first time many people have been arrested in Kawkareik. Today, they were knocking on the doors of other neighbourhoods whom they suspected,” said a woman close to ‘Palae Phyu’ local charity group.

Since the coup, at least five social workers in Kawkareik District have been arrested and

charged with violating the counter-terrorism Law in connection with the local armed groups, according to HURFOM records.

Throughout May 2023, HURFOM also reported a rise in the number of people being abducted by the junta and used as human shields. The junta soldiers are committing crimes against humanity in the Tanintharyi region by arresting local civilians and forcing them to be their guides through armed conflicts. This is also a direct violation of the law of war, reported local Dawei residents.

On April 26, when the military troops marched towards the Ra-nge and Waerik villages in Thayet Chaung Township, Dawei District, nearly one-hundred local people were arrested and released two days later by demanding ransom payments. ***“Those who can be redeemed with money are released quickly,”*** said a villager.

Villagers continue to be arrested and subjected to severe abuse. According to International Humanitarian Law, using human shields is strictly prohibited. This is also stated in the Geneva Convention. The fact that the military regime carelessly embarks on missions intended to devastate communities makes it clear that they act with impunity.

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

MAY 2023

According to local sources, the junta forces that entered the villages in eastern Dawei and arrested at least ten villagers from three villages in the area and used them as human shields along with its troops on 21 May 2023:

“At least five or five villagers from the village of Dar Thwe Kyauk were taken away and forced to go ahead and act as guides. Also, they entered Ah Nya Pyar village, arrested two more people, and then went down to U Yin Kyi village,” said the locals.

A field report from the northern Dawei District indicated that the junta forces and their alliance militias entered the village with about fifty troops. They arrested nearly thirty local workers as human shields on the morning of May 8, 2023. The local sources confirmed that those detained and used as human shields worked in a plantation near Wet Chaung village, Pagaw-Soon village tract, Yebyu Township.

“The local farm workers were arrested on the morning of May 8 when they left for work. After that, the junta forces took the villagers as their protection to the operation area where they wanted to go. The detainees were all taken with hands tied in the back,” said another anonymous source from the administrative area of KNU Brigade No.4.

Based on ground information received by HURFOM, six women were arrested on the evening of May 8, with twenty people from Wet Chaung Village in Yebyu Township.

“The first junta battalion is a joint unit of Infantry Battalion No.273 and Infantry Battalion No.406. The troop force is about 20 or 30 soldiers. They captured people from Wet Chaung village and used them as human shields. Another junta military column entered the nearby Kha Mout Chaung and seized the properties belonging to the locals. They took another ten villagers from Kha Mout Chaung when they left the village,” said an eyewitness source.

Those who escaped said that while stationed at the Kha Mout Chaung village school, the junta troops broke into some houses in the town and looted valuables and other livestock.

“The use of human shields is a war crime. No other armed actor has done such a despicable act in this age,” a local civilian defence force spokesman said while condemning the act as a war crime and a severe crime against humanity.

“Since we are resisting the junta council to minimize the harm to the people, we will not fight if there is a possibility that the people will be affected by the fighting on both sides. The junta military is taking

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

MAY 2023

advantage of this and attacking our forces in this area,” he continued.

Another worrying observation by HURFOM over this last month is that the houses and properties of those accused of supporting the revolutionary movement continue to be seized in Karen and Mon states. According to local people, the junta sealed off the houses and properties of those accused of disseminating and supporting the People’s Defense Forces in Karen State and Mon State and issued arrest warrants for the fugitives.

Between 10 to 14 May, soldiers isolated the properties of five civilians. They confiscated their homes in Myawaddy and Kyaik Hto due to unjust accusations.

Between 12 and 14 May, two local people from Kyaik Hto, Mon state, were arrested by the junta and charged with the deeply flawed and controversial anti-terrorism act. Their homes and shops were sealed. The estimated value of the houses and properties contained by the regime is worth more than one hundred million kyats. According to HURFOM’s previous data, eight seized assets in Myawaddy and fourteen cases in Thaton District, including Kyaik Hto.

During the last weeks of the month, the military also targeted young women, some as young as 15 and detained them for unjust

causes. On May 19, family members reported that the junta in Launglon, Dawei arrested a 16-year-old. She has not been heard from since 22 May.

According to family members and friends, the junta arrested Ma Yin Phuu Pwit, a teenager. She was taken away at a family-owned restaurant in Maungmakan Beach:

“Military intelligence came first in civilian clothes with the exact names of the person and store. Then the junta soldiers from the Mounmakan police station arrived in a car and arrested our daughter.”

Almost all police forces came and arrested her in civilian clothes. The resident said, “Yin Phuu Pwit is a person who sells and buys online, and it is not yet known exactly why she was arrested. Usually, the junta targets successful people. The military constantly watches them. We don’t know precisely whether Yin Phuu Pwit has shared current movement-related posts or written comments,” another resident assumed. “One possibility is that, like previous cases, the junta military arrested her on suspicion of helping the revolution.”

A few days later, another young woman was abducted by the junta. According to local sources, Ma Chaw Su Ther, who lives in Maung Ngan quarter, Mon State, was

SUMMARY OVERVIEW & ANALYSIS

MAY 2023

kidnapped by the junta intelligence at 3 PM on May 22 for allegedly ‘spreading false news’ on social media. The detainee is 21 years old. She was arrested at home.

The junta said they found information on her Facebook which could ‘negate to the state and public unrest.’ Ma Chaw Su Ther (Mi) was sentenced and charged with 56/2023, section 505-A of the Penal Code at the court. Currently, many social network users are being monitored.

Women and young girls continue to be targeted by the military junta. The lawlessness has also disrupted pathways of accountability for survivors of sexual violence. Mon women’s groups are warning of increased child sexual abuse incidents in villages across Mon State with no action being taken by the authorities.

Women’s groups cannot assist the victims due to the political crisis and security concerns. “We’ve heard many cases of child rape in villages. We’re in a difficult situation to help the victims. The rule of law has failed in Burma, and the police haven’t handled these cases,” said a Mon women leader. Since the coup, the rights of children have been widely violated. The number of domestic violence and sexual abuse cases has also increased. Due to security concerns, it is difficult to get detailed information on the exact number.

Junta-appointed village administrators have blocked the legal trials of cases involving the sexual abuse of minors, making it difficult to pursue justice for the victims. Mon women’s groups also mention the junta for freeing convicted child rapists.

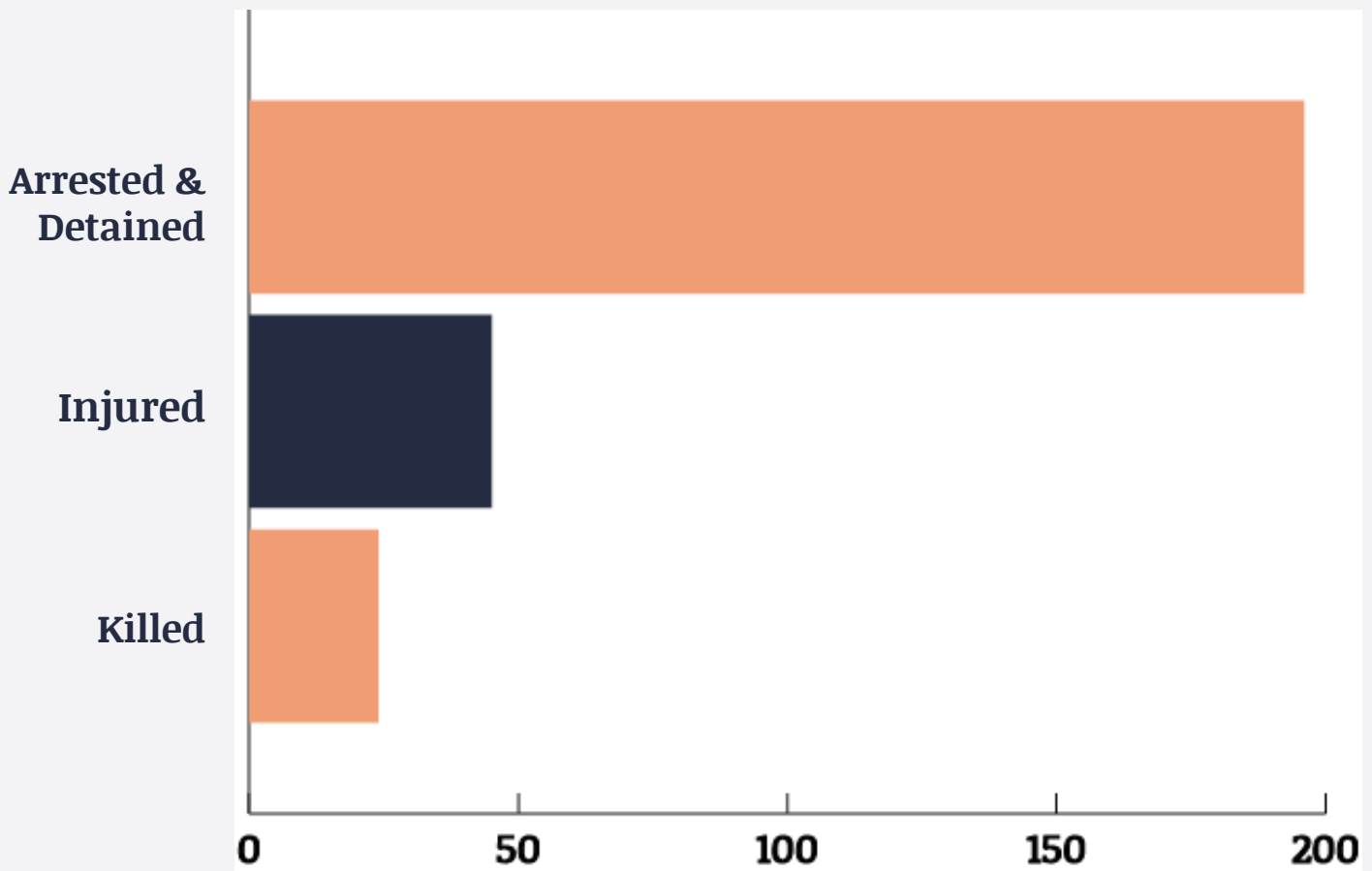
Further, the increasing surveillance and abuse of law show the deeply worrying extent to which the junta is willing to go to create an illusion of legitimacy. The people have widely rejected the military and will continue working toward their freedom and dismantling militarized systems.

These acts of violence are rooted in the sinister legacy of the military junta. Unless true and meaningful accountability ensures the regime and those complicit in all crimes are held responsible in a court of law, these crimes will continue to occur.

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 2023**, HURFOM recorded **least 119 arrested, 77 detained, 45 injured and 24 killed**.

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



3+

Pro-Democracy Activists Targeted by the Junta



PROTESTS ACROSS TARGET AREAS IN MAY 2023

4

TANINTHARYI REGION

3

MON STATE

1

KAREN STATE



24,500+

CIVILIANS DISPLACED ACROSS TARGET AREAS

CIVILIANS TARGETED IN MON, KAREN STATE & THE TANINTHARYI REGION

8+

DISMISSED FOR INVOLVEMENT IN THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

6+

PROTESTERS/ ACTIVISTS SENTENCED IN JUNTA COURTS

7+

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES BY THE MILITARY

80+

**CASES OF EXTORTION DURING
'STOP AND FRISK' IN ALL TARGETED
DOCUMENTATION AREAS**

140+

DAMAGED HOMES



54+

BURNED DOWN

65+

**CASES OF MOTORCYCLE
CONFISCATION IN
SOUTHERN MON
STATE AND NORTHERN
TANINTHARYI REGION**

47+

**MIDNIGHT RAIDS
& ARRESTS ACROSS
TARGET AREAS**

11+

**CASES OF RANSOMS
DEMANDED BY THE
JUNTA TO FREE
VILLAGERS**



12+

AIRSTRIKES IN SOUTHEASTERN BURMA



KAREN STATE

20,200+ Newly Displaced

18 Injured, 9 Killed



Mon State



Tanintharyi Region

The HURFOM documentation team reported heavy attacks against civilians in Karen State. The assaults have all come at a time when no active fighting was taking place. The unprovoked attacks have further resulted in severe injuries to women and children. Indiscriminate in nature, the ongoing brutalities by the junta have created an atmosphere of deep insecurity and fear throughout the State.

According to the Karen National Union (KNU) Central Information Department from Brigade No. 3, the junta forces shot a 23-year-old Karen villager dead in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyuang Lay Bin District Bago region. They inhumanely tortured another two villagers during the interrogation in the military camp.

On May 3 at 7:20 PM, Saw Lay Lay Htoo, a resident of Tagondai Ward, Natthankwin Town, Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaung Lay Bin District, was reportedly shot dead by security troops in front of Natthankwin General Hospital while returning to work from Yay Twin Kon Ward.

A witness who went to help Saw Lay Lay Htoo told reporters that the junta soldiers opened fire. The perpetrator was one of the patrolling officers on their sentry

duty returning from Bon-Tha-Taw Ward: ***“I heard a gunshot and found the body on the road. No one dares goes to see him,”*** she said. The victim’s motorcycle and the body were lying on the road. The wallet and phone belongings were taken away.

Junta battalions are continuously firing at the residences of the local people with artillery weapons. In some cases, although there was no armed conflict in the area, local people, including women and children, were killed or injured when they opened fire on community homes with artillery. On May 5, LIB No. 97, based in Kawkareik Township, fired artillery at 7:30 am. A 58-year-old woman was injured.

“Artillery motors fell into our village and exploded. They continued firing until nightfall, some of which exploded in the courtyard,” said a local source. The victim, Naw Ma Latt, age 58, from the middle quarter of the village, was hit by artillery on the right side of her head. It’s not life-threatening, but it needs much treatment. Currently, there are no medical teams in the village.

LIB No.97 and military troops at Hlaing Wa Hill constantly fired artillery mortars

around the town. Due to that random fire, Kawkareik residents are terrified of explosions that sometimes hit their quarters.

“Their military base is at Hlaing Wa Hill, and no one dares to go out to work and eat because they are shooting randomly from there. More than ten people were injured and died when they opened fire. Local people, including their livestock animals, faced every loss of homes, property, and livelihoods. Most of the firing came from LIB No.97. Although there was no fight, they just wanted to shoot randomly. On the one hand, we are facing the risk of life, and on the other hand, we are all facing famine,” said a resident.

Attacks can happen at any time. Artillery shells exploded in the brick factory site near the exit of Kawkareik town, in Karen State, at around 6:00 AM on May 6. One civilian was killed, and six were injured during the explosion. According to an anonymous witness, the military troops were based in the hills on the eastern side of Kawkareik town. They fired many indiscriminate shots toward the local Karen villages.

Much of the ammunition fell near residential areas and inside the neighbourhood. Some houses were destroyed and burnt by mortar shells. The villagers fled from their homes when they heard the shots fired. Some of those who couldn't run were sheltering

in trenches. All six civilians injured by the mortar shells fired by the military troops were not local villagers. According to a resident near the house, they were killed and wounded while temporarily moving here due to job opportunities.

“Almost all the houses and neighbourhoods in this area can be said to be battlefields. The military troops are stationed in at least three places around this area and firing daily. Nowhere can be said to be safe anymore. Travelling from one place to another is no longer easy for work or other matters. It becomes tough to work for a living. We also need humanitarian support. Many people are fleeing and staying near this city. I want to request the donors and social groups to support us,” a fifty-year-old who spoke to HURFOM said.

On 7 May, the junta carried out indiscriminate attacks, despite no armed conflict. The regime deployed airstrikes to bomb a village where Karen people lived in Ye Township, Mon State. It happened twice on the night of May 7 and the morning of May 8. Due to this sudden aerial attack, at least eight local villagers were seriously injured. Three were in critical condition, and an estimated 500 local villagers fled their homes in War Pa Tae village, a Karen ethnic majority village located in the Bay Lamu village tract. One of the villagers fleeing the attack said that the military started the aerial attack with an air jet on May 7:

“We heard the sound of a jet plane at 11:00 PM. We immediately realized it was not a typical plane sound and ran to hide in the ditch by our homes. As expected, the sound of a bomb explosion began near the school.” There has not been any fighting or conflict around Chaung Hnit Kwa, War Pa Tae, and Tha Pa Taw villages. “I can’t understand why they came to fight with an airstrike,” said a local villager.

As many as eight villagers were injured in the bomb attack, three of whom were seriously injured. Two Tha Pa Taw village members inside their hut outside War Pa Tae village were also wounded by the attack on May 8.

At least five houses, one school, and other village buildings were destroyed. Approximately 500 local people from three villages, Chaung Hnit Kwa, Bay Lamu and Tha Pa Taw towns and the surrounding areas, fled from the attack.

According to independent sources of two villagers from Tha Pa Taw village (a neighbouring town of War Pa Tae village), due to air strikes on May 7th and 8th, residents of Tha Pa Taw and other cities are fleeing the war. Three members of the local civilian defense forces were killed, and at least five were injured. However, HURFOM is still trying to confirm this information.

At present, the villagers from Chaung Hnit Kwa, Bay Lamu, Tha Pa Taw and

other villages who fled from the fighting are hiding in the jungles in the southeast of Ye Township (west side of the mountain) and are areas that rescue and social charity groups cannot reach the moment. Children, women, and the elderly are the most affected by war. Food, drinking water, and accommodation are urgently needed, said a KNU Battalion Medical Team No.16 member.

Destruction of property is yet another crime being committed by the junta during their clearance operations. According to the field data collected from the evening of May 9, at 5 am, a village Church, a primary school run by the community, and an estimated 20 homes were demolished by the Junta artillery weapons in Poe-Lo-Noh-Pho village, Kyaukgyi township, Nyaung Lay Bin district.

“The troops must have been from LIB No.439 or the Artillery Regiment Command No.351. They destroyed these buildings with artillery mortars from their base station, three kilometres from this village,” said a KNU Brigade No.3 member who did not want to be named.

Even earlier that day, the junta troops attacked and raided Lae Wai Gyi village in Kyaukgyi Township, destroying more than 30 houses. A school, a church, and all other buildings of the nursery school and the common area were also burnt

down by the same troops, according to the field research conducted by the documentation team from Brigade 3 areas.

Lae Wai Kyi and Poe-Lo-Noh-Pho villages in Kyaukgyi Township have more than 120 houses and a population of more than 1,200. According to KNU Brigade No.3, most residents have been fleeing due to such comprehensive clean-up operations and have been unable to return to their homes. Since May 13, 2023, the military has been destroying asphalt roads connecting villages in Kawkareik Township, Karen State:

“They also destroyed the road near the Taung Kyar Inn Bridge. The Vice Commander of the LIB 343 LIB supervised the destruction. They destroyed roads with a backhoe. Now about 30 villages have lost connection with Kawkareik. All villagers are in trouble,” said a local farmer.

On May 13, the military destroyed roadways connecting Southern Kawkareik, and on May 14, they destroyed the section of the road between Kawkareik – Kyaik Done Road and Ka Mile Gone Road. Then, they destroyed an asphalt road nearby Taung Kyar Inn Bridge on May 17.

“We can’t transport fruits from our plantation or sell fruits and vegetables farmed in our villages. We can’t do anything. We have to use the

Kyarinnseikyi route to go to Mawlamyine, and it’s very far away. We are all struggling with transportation,” said a Kaw Ka Rate Town fruit seller. After destroying roads, the military junta indiscriminately launched artillery attacks targeting villages alongside the Hong Tha Yaw River.

“They are afraid that the revolutionary forces will enter the town and attack them. This is why they’ve destroyed the roads,” said a Kaw Ka Rate resident.

Children are being targeted in the onslaught of attacks. On 21 May, artillery shots killed an innocent child, injured two, and forced more than 12,000 villagers from nine villages to flee their homes. The junta’s indiscriminate firing into villages with artillery weapons persists in Nyaung Lay Pin District. According to the information received on the morning of May 20, 2023, the junta military’s joint forces LIB No.599, LIB No.590, IB No.44, and IB No.84 opened fire with more than 50 shots in Sa Wae and Kyung Taw villages in Mu Township. These areas are all controlled by the Karen National Union in eastern Bago, on the border of Mon State.

Since the early morning of May 18, these collective forces have been shooting continuously from the outside of the village where they are stationed. Until now, a 14-year-old boy has died. And then, a 47-year-old woman and another

18-year-old boy were injured by mortar shells.

In addition to the casualties, many houses, and livestock, including a monastery, were destroyed, confirmed by those fleeing the two villages. According to local officials from KNU Brigade 3, food, supplies and accommodation assistance in new places are urgently needed.

According to a ground report released by KNU Brigade 6's information Department, on May 23, at 11:30 PM, the junta air forces deployed two bombs with a jet fighter. The attack damaged some homes and a church in Kha Lae Law Kyae village in Maw Khee village tract, Kawkaraik, Karen State. It is believed to have come directly from the Nay Pyi Taw Air Force Base. There were no casualties, but the church was destroyed entirely. Religious buildings continued to be destroyed, as are places people use often. We have been fighting from war for four decades.”

On May 22, one school, two residential houses, and one common wooden hall were damaged due to two shootings by a drone in Nyaung Kon village, Mu Township, KNU Administrative area. According to information from ground service providers, as many as 21,880 civilians were displaced during May 2023 due to indiscriminate aerial attacks and artillery firing by the junta.

Abductions and ransoms are also increasingly being demanded by the

junta. Out of the 55 residents of Kawkareik, Karen State, who were arbitrarily abducted and interrogated by the junta forces, only four were released by paying ransom demands, according to the families.

Sources close to the released villagers confirmed that the remaining 50 arbitrarily arrested are being tortured and detained daily, even in an army interrogation center. Based on groundless accusations of information and financial support to the joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army and People's Defense Force based in Kawkareik township, a total of 54 people from Kawkaraik were arrested and interrogated in a military camp from May 7 to 22 by the Junta forces.

On 25 May, about four people from this group were released because the relevant family members decided to pay ransoms at the junta's request. Although it could not be confirmed how much was paid for each person, outside information stated that each person was paid more than 20 lakhs in Myanmar Kyat. Sources close to some detainees conveyed that about 50 inmates who could not pay for ransom have lost contact with their family members.

“These people were arrested on false accusations that they were helping Captain Kyaw Thet, who equipped defensive resilience operations in this area and Kyar Phyu (white tiger) armed troops. The perpetrator troop is the

Infantry Battalion IB#97, based out of Hlaing Bawk,” he said.

About four more than 50 residents who were abducted from May 1 to May 21 have been freed after paying money. Still, some of them have not been able to communicate with their family members, said a person close to the family members of those arrested.

According to sources close to the village administrator, in addition, the villages outside the town, such as Sawhe, Nyaung Kile, Htee Po San, Hlaing Sein, Nyaung Nile and Yan Kok village administrators were also detained and interrogated on May 22. They were released after being demanded to report the activities of the local defence armed groups to the Junta and the general administrative department.

Currently, the military is working to eliminate village-to-village roads and highways in Kawkareik Township so that the other armed forces in the area cannot easily use them. Aircraft and drones frequently fly around, firing artillery upon suspecting villages or areas and persistently making a threat, and the residents are still fleeing from their homes.



MON STATE

4,800+ Newly Displaced

11 Injured, 7 Killed



Karen State



Tanintharyi Region

Indiscriminate firing at local villagers in Bilin Township, Mon State, continues as civilians are routinely injured due to such attacks. On May 6, at 9 PM, the military fired several artillery mortars into Ah Lu Lay village. According to the ground news team, at least one woman and one man were injured. As a result of the attack, more than 300 villagers fled, and some still could not return homes. A 40-year-old man said the Burma Army often attacks Ah Lu Lay village.

At least a dozen artillery mortars were fired indiscriminately by the junta forces stationed at the foothills of Along Taung and in front of the school, injuring two civilians from Ah Lu Lay: “Three houses were damaged due to heavy weapons. One couple, husband and wife, also were injured and had to flee.” Although their injuries are not life-threatening, the villagers are overwhelmed with fear due to constant attacks. These attacks led to another 300 IDPs from this area. There is no opportunity to work for their livelihoods, and a lack of security prevents humanitarian aid. **“We are suffering a lot here,”** said a resident.

“Artillery mortar shells burst into the village, and U Nay Myo Kyaw’s arm and Daw Khin San Yi’s face were badly hit by the artillery shells,” said eyewitnesses. **“It will be difficult to return to a**

normal state and to return to work to earn a living, even though it was not life-threatening,” alleged the neighbours who fled to a secure place.

On the morning of 18 May, another witness confirmed that a 35-year-old innocent villager from Ah Nin village, Thanbyuzayat, Mon State, was shot dead in the clash between the junta-backed forces and the KNU troops. The military and joint forces of the militia entered the village of Ah Nin and deployed troops at night. They raided the houses of unsuspecting people. Many villagers were trapped inside the town. Individuals from outside did not dare to enter. They fled to farms and other villages for shelter. Junta forces have been stationed around the village of Ah Nin in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, since the beginning of the evening of May 17. The town has been controlled and blocked, trapping more than 300 villagers.

The KNU came from outside the village to surround the junta’s troops stationed inside. The military started firing their guns, killing a 35-year-old individual. It is still unknown who he was. The villagers are very concerned and afraid of impending disaster from being used as hostages since the military has been stationed around the village.



Tanintharyi region

8,300+ Newly Displaced

16 Injured, 8 Killed



Karen State



Mon State

For residents of the Tanintharyi region, the daily challenges of their lives are worsening. Everyone has become a target, with many trying to maintain a low profile.

The junta sealed off the assets of a local businessman for allegedly supporting the local armed forces and detained him for over a month. On May 6, in Kawthaung District, Southern Tanintharyi Region, residents said that a group of junta forces, including the General Administrative Department and military officers, seized the property of one local businessman in Bokpyin Township. The victim, U Aung Zaw Oo, is an anti-regime activist and a local businessman from Kamar-Chaung village, and his family opened a gas station business a few years ago. On 6 May, the military sealed and seized his gas station, the house, the tea shop, and the entire plot of land.

U Aung Zaw Oo was arrested by the junta forces at his home on April 4 on the unjust accusation of supporting the People's Defense Forces. He was charged with section 50 (J) of the existing anti-terrorist law.

On April 4, four residents, including U Aung Zaw Oo, were arrested, and three of them were released six days later, but U Aung Zaw Oo continued to be detained, and more than a month later, his family's property was sealed.

“Whenever the junta forces and their intelligence in Bokpyin town receive suspicious information about the revolution, they arrest and inspect people. In some cases, the seizures were carried out before the accused were found guilty in court and had their property confiscated, meaning the junta forces have wholly disregarded the law.” A 39-year-old law specialist stated. **“The punishment of someone not responsible for any alleged wrongdoing is prohibited under international rules for armed conflict,”** he continued.

Homes and other properties belonging to anti-regime activists have not been sealed in Bokpyin township for a long time.

There is a constant flow of violence, sometimes resulting in murder in the Tanintharyi region. The junta troops attacked the People's Defense Armed Forces and committed two cases of arbitrarily arresting and torturing the residents based on false accusations.

According to the field team's report on May 9, the local eyewitnesses confirmed that two men from the village of Wae Yit village in Thayet-Chaung Township, Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region, were stopped and searched, then arrested and beaten by the junta.

“The victims, Ko Myo Myint Lay, over 40 years old, and Ko Kang Kang, age 30, who live ‘hand-to-mouth’, were tied their hands from the back and severely beaten by the soldiers with their gun butts and kicked by the boots,” a 40-year-old eyewitness from Wae Yit said.

“The troops must be from Infantry Battalion No.403 or 404. Right now, they are the only ones patrolling around this village and enforcing the military offensive against the PDFs in the areas,” said a 25-year-old resident.

It was not detailed why the two male villagers were arrested and beaten. According to a source close to the victims, the support allegations are likely connected with a local PDF group.

“The forces that arrested and beat Ko Kang Kang were junta military stationed at Tha Win Wa village Police Station. They were from IB No.403. When they went to Ya Nge village, they met Ko Myo Myint Lay again and beat them up. Friends of Ko Kang Kang confirmed that he suffered a fractured skull, and Ko Myo Myint Lay had a broken rib due to the beating. “I am pretty sure both detainees were not associated with any political movements or armed groups,” he continued.

On May 9, around 9:30 pm, about 50 military council soldiers were fully armed and stationed at the Ya Nge village monastery in Thayet-Chuang Township. They went around the village to forcefully raid unsuspecting homes and cause irritation. Some villagers (an estimated 70 households) did not dare to stay in their houses and fled to nearby places.

Early morning of May 10, the junta military consisting of more than 30 soldiers from Infantry Battalion No.403 raided Nyaung Zin village in Thayet Chaung Township, #Dawei, abducted about fourteen local villagers, including five women, and beat them on the road, according to eyewitnesses.

Before entering the village, they stormed into Nyaung Zin village, threatening to shoot with weapons from two lorries. A 40-year-old villager told the incident on the evening of May 10 that most of those arrested were villagers who went out to shop for food in the morning,

“We usually see that they go in by military trucks and lorries. This time, the junta forces used civilian trucks, like a lorry truck carrying stones or a garbage truck. They indiscriminately fired into the village and grabbed the villagers they saw on the street that morning. The majority of the detainees were young men. Those who refused to detain were kicked in the boots and hit by gun butts. It happened around 6:30 in the morning,” said the residents.

According to the sources of three local villagers, these perpetrators’ units were from the Junta’s Light Infantry Battalion LIB No.403, operating under the Coastal Regiment Command based in Dawei. “One of us saw their badges and mentioned LIB 403. Some troops searched the houses along the road in the middle village,” said a 50-year-old witness from Nyaung Zin.

All detainees were confirmed interrogated and beaten on the side of the road until 2:00 PM; later on, four men were taken away with their faces covered and their hands tied behind their backs, the residents said.

Nyaung Zin Village is a large village on the Dawei-Myeik highway, about 8 miles away from Dawei. Last April 23, more than 90 local people, including three children, were arrested in Ya Nge village by the junta military during the local operation; some were released in the following days. However, the remaining villagers have not been released yet.

According to local sources, the junta has increased their presence in Dawei City, Tanintharyi Region. The city entrance and exit have been more stringent, and suspects have been arrested on various charges. Sources close to the victims confirmed that about eight people, including local women, were arrested one night on May 17.

“All the main roads leading into Dawei, including the small lanes, are under strict control by the junta and Pyu Saw Htee militias. There is suspicion since there is more control and inspection.”

On 17 May, three women and five men were arrested overnight. The youngest person who was abducted at 11:40 pm was a 17-year-old boy. Some of those arrested are not from Dawei, but they hold different regions of ID cards. Patrols and house checks are still being conducted outside the city. Local witnesses said that on May 17, six Dawei residents and two others from far away were arrested in one night.

Residents also stated that they opened fire at several points with heavy weapons before entering the village: “The sound of gunfire and artillery started at 9 PM. We heard around ten gunshots and several explosions. Their forces consisted of around 150 junta soldiers, and they entered this side yesterday morning,” said a 50-year-old villager from the area.

Villages in this area, such as Pa Kari, Pa Khab and Tha Yat Ngok villages have been repeatedly raided by junta troops for the past six months, which also forced most of the residents (an estimated 8,000) to flee and evacuate for a long time. Most villagers of U Yin Kyi, Dar Thwe Kyauk, and Ah Nya Pyar villages, which had been raided recently, are local farmers who rely on farming, orchard, and plantation for their livelihoods.

Villagers reported that nine residents of Bang La Moot village and East Maw Ton village in Tanintharyi township, who have been arbitrarily arrested since May 22, have not been released.

“All nine were arrested as a group on the night of May 22 by the Artillery Unit No.306 and the joint unit of LIB No.557 for allegedly supporting the Local Defense Forces. It was around 9 PM. About three women from East Maw Ton village and Panut village were included. It is confirmed that it was unknown at which military camp they were taken and detained.

The week before the attack, the junta entered Panut village of Bang La Moot village tract and arrested four male villagers. It cannot be confirmed yet whether they have been released or not. The number of disappearances in Tanintharyi, where the arrests are being made, has increased from 5 to 16. Due to arbitrary arrests by the junta military, who made various accusations and tortures during the interrogation, three suspected prisoners died while detained and examined. **“Nowadays, arrests are often made without any specific information.”**

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Inflation across all target areas has devastatingly affected civilians who cannot meet their basic needs.
2. The extortion of civilians is ongoing. Residents of Thanbyuzayat reported that the Ward Administrative Chairman is arbitrarily levying money from the people to reconstruct the district administration office that was destroyed by a mine explosion.
3. Mon women's groups are warning of increased child sexual abuse incidents in villages across Mon State with no action being taken by the authorities.
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. 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.
7. Torture remains rampant in Burma and across target areas where innocent civilians are subjected to gruelling, horrifying acts by the junta to extract information.
8. 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.
9. Military impunity remains deeply ingrained in the institutions representing the Tatmadaw, which only encourages the junta to continue perpetrating human rights violations.
10. Children are targeted by the military junta and deprived of basic needs, including medical attention, food, education, and the right to live safely.
11. The junta's arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention 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. 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.
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.

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

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

MAY 2023

