

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

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

OCTOBER
2022



Abductions and Arbitrary Arrest on the Rise in Southeastern Burma, Unrest Continues to Threaten Civilian Security & Well-being

OCTOBER 2022

Worrying increases of civilian abductions and unlawful detentions throughout the month of October in areas of southeastern Burma including Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region, have sparked fears among local communities. The military junta is expanding their operations throughout various townships and villages and have not hesitated to act violently upon anyone they perceive to be a threat.

Tensions are high, and local residents are hesitant to leave their homes and risk encounters with the Burma Army, which can result in questioning, extortion and bribery for the release of items or loved ones detained. Civilians are being wrongfully incriminated and charged on baseless, fabricated charges. The legal system has been weaponized by the junta, making prospects for true and meaningful justice impossible.

Throughout the month of October, HURFOM documented nearly a dozen cases of abductions by the junta for accusing people of loyalties to opposition forces. On 2 October 2022, in Yebyu township, Dawei at least thirteen youths were arrested over the period of three days. Some of them have been missing for weeks, according to family members. The reasons for most arrests are

alleged communication, affiliation and support for the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and/or the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). On 28 September 2022, early in the afternoon, a 25-year-old named Ko Aung Thet Naing and Min Min, age 21, were arrested on unproven allegations of being involved in the pro-democracy struggle. They have since disappeared.

Again on October 17, at 7:30 AM, local witnesses reported that the joint troops of junta forces and their sponsored militia troops abducted four local male villagers on accusations of being associated with the PDF. Two detainees out of four were identified as the local villagers. Only two of the four arrested men are in known locations, and the other two are still missing. However, they are just ordinary villagers. In a separate but related case on October 16 2022, military troops arrived at Min Yet Village in Long Lon Township in the evening and inspected the residents. Three were arrested and sent to a military detention camp. All three have also disappeared until now.

These are not isolated incidents. The abductions are a part of a wider goal by the military to completely dissolve support for the Spring Revolution through fear and

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violence. These attempts have been unsuccessful as advocacy to hold the regime accountable for their crimes continues.

Indiscriminate firing, including the shelling of mortars and artillery, in civilian areas is another example of deliberate attempts by the Burma Army to weaken support for resistance movements. An innocent person from Ye township, Mon State, was shot dead by junta soldiers at the end of September 2022. U Win Khaing, age 43 and a resident of Bay-Kalwe village, was killed by Light Infantry Battalion 106 troops. According to eyewitnesses working on the nearby rubber farm, U Win Khaing was shot in his back by five gunshots from two military vehicles: **“Gunshot wounds were found on the back of his head. It is possible that the soldiers shot U Win Khaing thinking he was a member of the PDF armed forces. As far as we know, he is an ordinary villager,”** said an eyewitness. His body was taken away by a free funeral service from Mokbanin village, Lamine Town, Ye. The nearest military force, Light Infantry Battalion 104, has not admitted to the murder. According to HURFOM documentation, this was the fourth instance of someone shot and killed by the junta in this area without justice.

Two more young villagers were arbitrarily arrested by the junta forces in Zeyarmyaing Ward, Mawlamyine, Mon State, on October 6 2022 after being accused of being associated

with the local PDFs in their areas, as confirmed by the families. Mg Thein Zaw Latt, age 20, and Soe Win Htun, also age 20, both from Htnin-Yu village of Thanbyuzayat Township: **“They are being detained and interrogated in Mawlamyine. I am worried about them being beaten. These boys are innocent. They’re just University students. I am sure that they have never been involved with any armed resistance groups,”** said a relative.

The destruction of civilian properties is ongoing alongside warrantless raids. Often this takes place after civilians have fled looming attacks. Soldiers invade their villages, force their way into homes and steal food, possessions and ruthlessly scatter their materials before leaving. Sometimes the junta will scorch the village completely. Local villagers in Yebyu Township, Dawei reported that after they fled to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade No. 4 of eastern Dawei, that their locked homes were destroyed. Their remaining belongings and properties were stolen and ruined by the junta: **“On October 2, at least 20 houses left by the homeowners who fled to the eastern Dawei for security were ruined by the junta forces Light Infantry Battalion 406 and 401,”** said a local source. Most locked doors were destroyed by the Burmese troops, including gas station owner houses and those selling goods in the village. At least eight motorcycles in the

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villages and a truck were seized. Many homes are no longer in good condition. A 45-year old male villager from Hnan Kyae told HURFOM reporters. ***“I am in a situation where I don’t know when I’ll be allowed to go home. I can’t think about how to rehabilitate. We constantly need food and medical aid.”***

Martial law, particularly in Mon State, is being strictly enforced by the junta which has had a serious impact on the mobility of civilians amid increasing surveillance. Act #144, which is commonly known as martial law, bans local people from going outside at night. The impact of this curfew has prevented many from going to their workplaces and participating in social activities. ***“If one of our friends has an illness, we usually visit them and provide assistance both day and night. We help each other. But martial law has been imposed on us. No one dares go out at night. All health, social and traditional activities are neglected,”*** said a social worker. The military imposed ban denies people the right to go outside from 8pm to 4am. In some townships the ban begins at 10pm and is in effect until 4am: ***“Those with emergency health problems are in trouble at the moment. Even if they have an illness, they dare not go to the clinic at night as they’re afraid of the military. Shootings and killings are frequent now,***

and no one provides help to another. Even the emergency rescue teams have had to stop their services,” said a social worker from Lamine Town, Mon State.

Meanwhile, conflict continues to displace hundreds. Junta forces offensives in Kyaik Hto Township have forced as many as 2,000 villagers from their homes. The junta designated Kyaik Hto Township as an offensive area and have carried out severe military attacks against the armed forces in the Karen National Liberation Army Brigade #1 nearly every day across the last month.

Local inhabitants living in the armed conflict zones have been escaping and leaving their homes day-to-day. “I still do not have actual numbers, but up to now, I suppose at least 2,000 people fled the fighting within a week”, according to aid workers in the area. Most internally displaced people (IDPs) are elderly, children, and women sheltering in Brigade 1 of the areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU): ***“Emergency response groups are infrequent, and we want those groups to come to provide basic food and health care. I am sure that the KNU will help those on the ground,”*** said a social worker.


The threat and increasing likelihood of indiscriminate firing has led to villagers fleeing in groups. One local who abandoned

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his home for fear of losing his life told HURFOM: *“Artillery mortars from the Burmese Army slipped into my backyard. These kinds of indiscriminate fires could kill us anytime. That’s why I drove to leave my home to get here. Most of the villagers couldn’t remain in the villages.”*

After nearly two years since the attempted coup, the challenges created by the Burma Army are ongoing and threaten to only further destabilize the well-being of civilians. The military junta has no interest in advancing their rights of civilians, nor are they interested in peace. It is “business as usual” for the corrupt Commanders and soldiers who value profit over people. The international community must take the plight of civilians in Burma seriously and address their concerns with tangible actions which include going beyond statements of condemnation. The success of the democracy movement must include strong allies who have courage to stand with the people and not with authoritarian regimes.

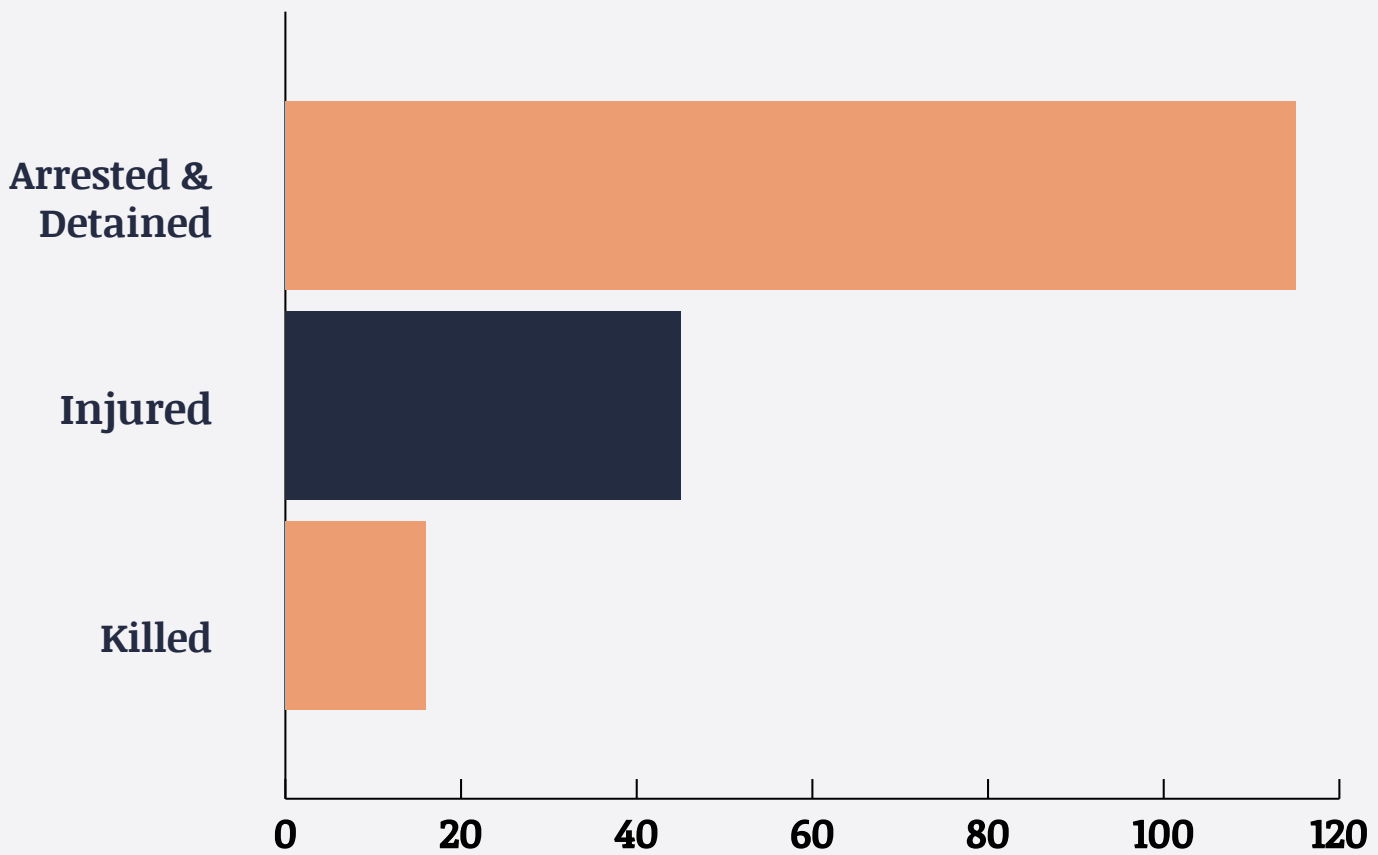


“Indiscriminate fire could kill us anytime. That’s why I drove to leave my home to get here. Most of the villagers couldn’t remain in the villages.”

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 October 2022, HURFOM recorded least 70 arrested, 47 detained, 45 injured and 16 killed.**

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



Members of the National League for Democracy and their families targeted by the military junta.

14

PROTESTS ACROSS TARGET
AREAS IN OCTOBER 2022

12

TANINTHARYI
REGION

1

MON STATE

1

KAREN STATE



15,000+

CIVILIANS DISPLACED ACROSS TARGET AREAS

CIVILIANS TARGETED IN MON, KAREN STATE
& TANINTHARYI REGION

10+

DISMISSED FOR
INVOLVEMENT
IN THE CIVIL
DISOBEDIENCE
MOVEMENT

4+

PROTESTERS/
ACTIVISTS
SENTENCED IN
JUNTA COURTS

16+

ENFORCED
DISAPPEARANCES
BY THE MILITARY



KAREN STATE

6,900+ Newly Displaced

24+ Injured, 6+ Killed



Mon State



Tanintharyi Region

Airstrikes in Karen State, deployed by the military junta, continue to undermine civilian safety as residential areas are explicitly targeted. On 6 October 2022, at least three villages located 4 miles north of Three Pagodas Town near the Thai-Burma border were fired at. Villagers from Mae-Ka-Thar village, Three Pagodas Pass and Kyainnseikyi, who were forced to flee, verified that due to air strikes, at least eight villagers' houses and a Buddhist monastery were destroyed during the brutal attacks. Prior to the attack, several days before fighting had broken out between the joint troops of KNLA Brigade 6, and PDFs. Due to the attack, approximately 500 children, women and the elderly were forced to abandon their villages. Heavy rains and floods have made it more difficult for villagers to escape.

Again, on October 23 2022, close to midnight, junta forces relaunched a series of air attacks and artillery shells targeting Hlaing Kwei village, located in Yay-Pu-Gyi village tract, Kawkareik Township, Karen State. This caused more than 200 villagers from 8 villages to flee. A 40-year-old villager who spoke to reporters told HURFOM: ***“Two artillery attacks came first and exploded near the village. Then the villagers started fleeing. Some managed to escape to the village’s Buddhist Monastery.”*** Later, some soldiers from the Karen National Liberation Army arrived and told the villagers to not take refuge in the monastery because the Burma Army will target them. Due to the attacks by the junta, locals from Wizzar-gone village, Hlaing Kwei, Win village, Win Pote, Hpan-Khar-Gone and Kyun-Taw villagers, Kawkariek approximately 300 fled the attacks overnight.

As HURFOM and other civil society organizations have routinely called for, aviation fuel must be sanctioned, and a global arms embargo imposed.



MON STATE

4,400+ Newly Displaced

8+ Injured, 3+ Killed



Karen State



Tanintharyi Region

HURFOM reported more offensives in Mon state and military operations which sought to bring more fear and instability. On October 2, 2022, Light Infantry Battalion #31 and the Mon State Defense Force (South) (MSDF-S) engaged in an armed clash in Khaw Zar Town, Ye Township, Mon State. Two soldiers died as a result of the fighting. Soon after, the armed clash, the military fired bombs in the village. Three days later on October 5, 2022, the local Light Infantry Battalion #31 detonated two bombs on the outskirts of Khaw Zar Town. Their purpose was to frighten residents. Then, the military issued an order banning locals from going to their plantations. **“We are all frightened. No one dares to go outside,”** said a woman from Khaw Zar.

In Mon State, martial law has been imposed in every township. This has consequently disrupted the ability of rubber plantation workers to get to work: **“It’s impossible to do our jobs because we must do our work at night between 2AM and 4AM to tap the rubber trees. If something happens to us, no one will be able to protect us. We are vulnerable daily workers. We dare not resist the junta,”** said a 30-year-old plantation worker from Thanbyuzayat Township. In

villages of Mudon Township, village Administrators have made unique “ID cards” for the plantation workers, including their picture, name, ward/village, and phone number of the village Administrator. Workers are to carry these cards and show them if they are stopped by the military. They said if something happens to them, they will solve the problem. However, there is low confidence in this plan.

Across HURFOM target areas, since the attempted coup, civilians have expressed a lack of assurance in the promises of the junta-backed village administrators. They have extorted money from workers who wanted to have one of these permit-to-work cards. In addition, interactions with the junta troops at night can be deadly. On September 23 2022, a villager from Ka Log village, Southern Ye Township, Mon State was shot and killed by the military security forces. Soldiers said he breached martial law. **“My rubber plantation is in Thanbyuzayat, and we live in Mudon Township’s Administrative zones. They granted the “ID card” but we’re always stopped by the junta soldiers at the check-point on the way to our work anyways,”** said another rubber plantation worker in Kwan Hlar village.

Restrictions are also increasing in military-run prisons. Following a package that detonated in Yangon's Insein prison on October 19th 2022, the junta has suspended permissions to visit their detained family members and indefinitely stopped food parcels from being sent. A family member of a long-term political prisoner said the prison.

Authorities in Dawei announced that the family visit was closed on October 19 2022. Most of them are worried about other adverse effects:

“I'm worried that my brother will be tortured. In the past, there were cases where prisoners were beaten in prison after family members or other rights based groups' monitored the situation,”

said a family member of the detainees in Kyaikmayaw Prison.

Similarly, one family member said that in the Taung Kalay prison in Pha An, Karen State, they can no longer request permission to visit detained family members. This has been a disastrous blow to their morale.

Education is yet another pillar that has been attacked by the military junta as students must keep low-profiles. Five young students from Mawlamyine University were arbitrarily abducted in midnight raids on 3 October 2022. It is not known on what charges they were arrested on, but witnesses said that some of them were beaten. Late at night, junta soldiers and officers from the General Administration Department arrived with three military trucks. They knocked on the doors of male hostels in Zeya Myaing Ward, Mawlamyine. Five students, including Soe Win Tun, a second-year student, were taken away, according to a witness. No one knows where they were taken.

As the military commits crimes with impunity, the lack of rule of law has created an environment of criminality with thefts on the rise.

HURFOM reported that gold shop owners and business persons from Thanbyuzayat, Mon State, have become frequent targets for armed robbery: ***“Recently, a man entered a giant egg shop in our ward at about 6PM, and pretended to be a buyer but suddenly threatened the shop owner with a weapon. The owner lost about 3 million Kyat. The robber also threatened the owners that he would return to kill him if he told others what happened to him,”*** said a local resident.

According to multiple local sources, another incident involved a group of armed persons robbing a giant gold shop in Thanbyuzayat on August 9, 2022. In addition, a shop selling monk accessories and a shop selling construction tools, and a rubber plantation were each robbed by groups of armed persons on August 16 and 17, respectively. Even though shop owners suffer significant losses, they do not file police reports fearing for their lives. ***“We’ve frequently heard about robberies both in downtown wards and villages. It is happening everywhere. Filing a report to the police is not easy as the current situation is bad. We have to worry about our lives,”*** said one resident. Since the attempted coup, the authorities have demonstrated little interest in investigating or even responding to any police reports filed by residents.

The Mon State junta forces have continued to seize homes and other property from pro-democracy activists, politicians, and those associated with the National Unity Government and its related organizations. HURFOM has documented cases of this throughout the year, including in September 2022 when the houses of Khun Myint Htun, Chairman of Pa’O People’s Federal Council (PNFC), was seized by the junta. However, the military also targets places of worship and education. A Mon National Primary school located at Yin Dein Village, southern Ye Township, Mon State, was set on fire and destroyed on 6 October 2022. Local villagers suspected that Infantry Battalion No.31 committed the arson.

Southern Mon State, including Yin Dein Village, has seen fierce fighting and bloody reprisals with local PDFs regularly clashing with junta forces in the areas: ***“No group targets public buildings such as schools or hospitals, except the junta forces who destroy buildings with impunity,”*** a 50-year-old Yin Dein villager said. Junta troops have torched hundreds of houses and buildings in neighboring Karen State and Tanintharyi region over the past few months.



Tanintharyi region

5,500+ Newly Displaced

22 Injured, 11 Killed



Karen State



Mon State

On October 7 2022, at around 10:30 AM, a young woman, age 22 named Ma Tharaphu, was abducted by the joint forces of the junta military intelligence and pro-junta militia troops after a preliminary investigation, a local witness reported. ***“Ma Tharaphu, an ordinary villager, was arrested along with a motorcycle in Kyaukni Maw Village, Long Lon Township, Dawei District.”*** The junta troops checked her phone and arrested her immediately. She is one of at least another three young villagers who were stopped and arrested when the troops checked their cell phones.

Again, another woman was targeted on October 22, 2022, at 8:30 PM, when two local residents from Long Lon Township, Dai were abducted by a military intelligence officer on accusations of supporting the resistance movement. Ko Soe Soe, a male villager, 28, and Ma Mee Nge, a female villager, were arrested after returning from work. They were brought to the Army Lorry: “They both were detained at one of the cells in Long Lon SA-YA-HPA (Intelligence Bureau Detention Camp) and being interrogated with torture by the military intelligence official.. They are both likely to be charged under the Terrorism Act” a

source said. According to HURFOM fieldworker’s records, at least 12 residents were arbitrarily arrested last week by the Junta forces in Long Lon Township, Dawei.

Midnight raids and door-to-door searches are ongoing in western Dawei areas. The operations of the junta forces are linked with the preparation of the next general election, which is being planned by the military according to locals. Following the armed attacks targeting junta administrative offices, the junta forces Light Infantry Battalion No. 406 and the military forces have been conducting door-to-door searches of civilian homes and committing arbitrary arrests. One notable thing is that the junta started conducting census collection for the upcoming general election. “In our village, they started to count how many people per household, how many people over the age of 18, as well as the numbers of men, women,” Nai Nyan, age 55, a resident of Yebyu Township told HURFOM.

Since October 8 2022, the number of young people who were arbitrarily abducted by the junta joint forces has been increasing.

According to the relatives and families, five more Yebyu residents have been accused of being linked with the PDFs. They were arbitrarily arrested, and tortured by junta forces on the evening of October 7, 2022. In one case, the junta forces kidnapped and abducted a 30 year old pregnant woman, who was the wife of a man on the junta's want list, Ko Nyi Aung, a medic from Yebyu Township: ***“At first, the Burmese soldiers and junta-backed militia troops came and arrested Ko Nyi Aung. When they did not find him, they grabbed his pregnant wife. We heard that he later turned himself in because he was worried about his wife,”*** an eyewitness reported.

On 13 October 2022, at around 7:00 a.m., a bomb explosion occurred in front of the office of the General Administration Department of Thayet Chaung Township, Dawei. Locals reported that the military had arrested two others, including Ko Aung Ko Shein, accusing them of being responsible for the blast. A local said that no one knows which interrogation center they were taken to: ***“We are living between two fires now. When and who will die next? And no one knows who will be arrested. It's really the most challenging time for all of us.”***

In addition, ongoing 'stop and frisk' policies being deployed by the junta have led to horrific accounts of civilians being shot point-blank on baseless, and unfounded accusations. One villager told HURFOM that the junta is acting like they have a 'license to steal' with checkpoints and security toll gates between Ye to Yebyu Township being used to extort civilians. Since the beginning of October 2022, the violations have increased. Soldiers demanded a private car or van from 50,000 to 100,000 Myanmar Kyat and the delivery truck or lorry for double that amount. ***“When they see young travelers. They pull them out of the car and check them aggressively. If you deny it again, they beat you. Usually, they will be released after being asked to pay huge amounts of ransoms,”*** said a local who spoke to reporters. Communities HURFOM spoke to allege the junta makes 'millions' every day off of these attacks.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Inflation across all target areas has had a devastating toll on civilians who are unable to have their most basic needs met.
2. There has been a noticeable uptick in violence against women including the beating of a pregnant woman, and ongoing detainment of young women who face beatings in junta custody.
3. Twelve junta soldiers ran away from their Mawrawaddy Navy Battalion in Kan Bauk region, located in Yebyu Township, Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region. They took their weapons with them when they defected. Local residents reported that the junta has since tightened security.
4. Clashes have led to forced internal displacement in Burma as instability and tensions force people from their homes.
5. Concerns have spread as the military junta begins to make decisions which would bar competing, democratic parties from the next election in Burma. The military junta has been trying to change/manipulate the numbers of constituencies.
6. Motorcycles, mobile devices, and money are regularly confiscated and extorted from civilians at checkpoints stationed by the junta deliberately along key-routes. Civilians were 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 grueling, horrifying acts by the junta to extract information.
8. The international community including UN bodies and ASEAN are not responding swiftly enough to the situation on the ground in Burma, which demands urgent attention and consequences for the junta.
9. Military impunity remains deeply ingrained into the institutions representing the Tatmadaw, which only emboldens the junta to continue perpetrating human rights violations.
10. Children have been targeted by the military junta, and deprived of their basic needs including medical attention, food, education and the right to live safely.
11. The arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention by the junta are ongoing, as are warrant-less raids and indiscriminate firing into civilian 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.
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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