



# ON-THE-GROUND IN BURMA

A DIGITAL BRIEFER

Issue 11 | December 31, 2021

## MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- The [UN credentials committee](#) decides to keep Burma's current representative to the UN, Kyaw Moe Tun.
- Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to [2 years](#) in prison for incitement and violating COVID-19 restrictions. She potentially faces more than [100 years](#) in total jail time once all verdicts are passed down.
- Rohingya refugees in the US and UK are suing [Facebook](#) for \$1 billion. They state Facebook's platforms promoted genocidal violence against the Rohingya in 2017.
- Meta (formerly Facebook) moves to [ban](#) all Burma military-controlled businesses from all of its platforms.
- Junta-appointed foreign minister, Wunna Maung Lwin [meets](#) Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Impose immediate targeted sanctions on the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise and the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank;
2. Provide immediate cross-border assistance, directly to local civil society organizations, particularly those working in ethnic areas and conflict zones;
3. Recognize and engage with the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate government of Burma instead of the illegal military junta;
4. Exert all possible pressure through every available means, including multilateral, regional and bilateral engagement, to ensure that the military allows humanitarian assistance in the impacted areas, immediately stops offensives throughout the country, immediately, and unconditionally releases all arbitrarily detained protesters and political prisoners.

# ANALYSIS

## Human Rights Abuses under the Coup

The Burmese military has a long-documented history of committing human rights violations in the ethnic states. Since the February 1st coup, this has only increased and intensified at an alarming rate, as well as spread to Burma's central region, as the junta targets anti-coup opposition. While junta forces violently crackdown on anti-coup protesters in central Burma, it is also systematically conducting clearance operations in the ethnic states. As the international community refuses to enact any tangible action, the junta takes their inaction as a sign to continue committing human rights abuses with impunity.

### Since the February 1st Coup

\*AAPP figure is estimated, the actual number may be higher



11,200+  
Arrests



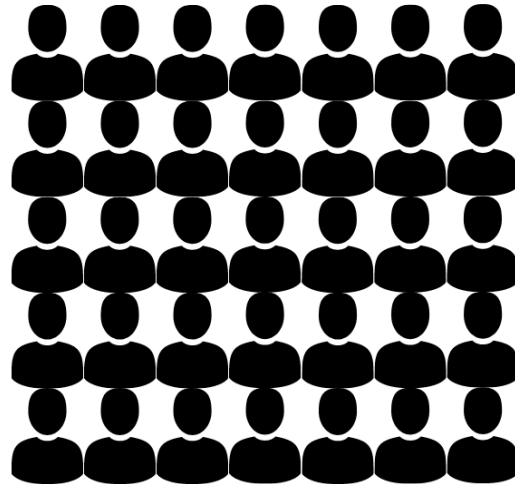
8,000+  
Detained



1,300+  
Killed



1,900+  
Warrants



On Dec. 24, 35 unarmed civilians, including women, children, and elderly, were arrested and burned alive by junta forces in Karenni state.



10,000 Karen fled  
airstrikes in December

“

After the coup, we  
have to live in fear.

*IDP, Dooplaya District, Karen State*

”

**TWO SAVE THE  
CHILDREN STAFF  
MEMBERS  
MURDERED**

\*SAVE THE CHILDREN 2021

As 2021 comes to a close, Burma is still suffering from a coup that has now lasted close to 1 year. Estimates from late December [report](#) over 1,300 killed and close to 11,200 arrested since February 1st. The Burmese military continues to run the country unchecked and with no regard for human rights, making an already dire situation increasingly desperate.

Attacks on civilians in the ethnic states have continued to cause mass forced displacement and loss of life. Most recently, on December 25, it was [reported](#) that 35 villagers in Karenni state were killed by military soldiers who then burned the bodies in an attempt to conceal evidence. It is likely that the actual death toll is higher. Save the Children, an international humanitarian aid organization working in the region, has [stated](#) that 2 of its staff members were killed in the attack. While the Burmese military has always perpetrated violence in Karenni and other ethnic states, this most recent instance falls in a line of abuses that create a worrisome pattern- if the military continues to run with free reign, their attacks will echo the vicious crackdowns in Chin and Karen states seen earlier this year.



*35+ unarmed civilians arrested, handcuffed, and burned alive by Burmese troops in Moso village, Karenni State.  
Photo cred: Karenni Human Rights Group*

Notably, the [shelling and burning](#) of entire villages in Chin state in September led to soldiers killing targeted civilians, committing arson, and causing thousands of IDPs to flee their homes with little idea of where to go. Now, those in Karenni state are witnessing the same abuses. On

December 20, the Burmese military launched an artillery attack and burned 20 homes in Karenni state's Loikaw township, with villagers [describing](#) soldiers as coming to "torch houses in the village for no reason."



*Burmese military burned multiple houses in Ke Bar village, Sagaing region on December 13.  
Photo Cred: Myanmar Now*

The military's brutality can also be seen in the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Karen state, where [aid blockages](#) and military checkpoints deter humanitarian groups and civilians from delivering IDPs vital food, water, and medicine. This is especially troubling in light of the military's intensified fighting in Karen state that has caused over [10,000 villagers](#) to flee their homes. Estimates from Thai authorities in December report 5,358 civilians having crossed the Moei River in search of refuge in Thailand. Similarly, IDPs in Karenni state [suffer](#) in remote areas of the forest with limited resources and donations, with populations ranging from newborn infants to the elderly. Nurses and other healthcare professionals are also working out of Karenni state's forests, running [makeshift treatment centers](#) for COVID patients in light of the country's increasingly dire COVID-19 situation.

Clearly, the intensified violence witnessed initially in central Burma then Chin, Karen, and Karenni states can easily transfer to Shan, Kachin and Mon states. These strategic clearance operations can circle back strengthening an



already established cyclical pattern of human rights abuses targeting anyone that is fighting for their basic human right, whether or not they associated or affiliated with democracy activists. The military's illegitimate power is only heightened as they are given the freedom to rotate where next to carry out human rights abuses with impunity

Additionally, Aung San Suu Kyi faces 11 charges in total, and was most recently [sentenced](#) to two years in prison on December 6 for breaking COVID-19 restrictions (not wearing a mask while campaigning last year) and inciting opposition against the coup. On December 27, it was [announced](#) that the verdicts for two more of Aung San Suu Kyi's charges would be moved to January 10. These arbitrary verdicts demonstrate the junta's attempt to further delegitimize Aung San Suu Kyi's rule and uplift their illegally seized power to continue committing atrocities with impunity.



*Buildings in Thantlang, Chin state burned to the ground by Burmese military.*

*Photo cred: Chin Human Rights Organization*

In an attempt to hold the Burmese military accountable, on December 10, the Myanmar Accountability Project [submitted](#) to the International Criminal Court for a criminal investigation of Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity. Formal international recognition of the junta's crimes marks a positive step in the

process for justice and accountability and should be done in tandem with a Rohingya genocide declaration, both of which would call attention to the daily suffering experienced by ethnic nationalities.

Despite the current state of affairs in Burma, there is always hope. December 10 marked Human Rights Day, a time meant to observe the inalienable rights and dignity of all. To retaliate against the junta and show opposition to the coup, civilians held a "[silent strike](#)" and effectively cleared major streets, markets, and towns across the country, describing silence as "the loudest shout." Further, global grassroots are mobilizing to end unethical business practices in Burma. Calls for [Chevron](#) to end its operations in Burma and cut ties with the military echo those urging jewelry companies to stop sourcing from Burmese gems. On December 9, jeweler Harry Winston [announced](#) that it would cease sourcing from Burma given the large stake that the Burmese military holds in the country's gemstone sector.

The Burmese military's ego continues to inflate as it runs unchecked throughout the country. The people of Burma are nearing 1 year of violent and illegal rule, a reality that will only lengthen should the international community continue to remain stagnant on any action for Burma. As previously emphasized, a global arms embargo is necessary to ensure that no weapons or military technology reach the hands of the Burmese military- any opportunity to increase the military's capacity to commit human rights abuses needs to be prevented while feasible. Further, targeted sanctions on the junta and its connected businesses will halt profits for the military and ensure that military forces cannot as efficiently terrorize the country. Without decisive action, the people of Burma will be left to suffer under the Burmese junta regime.

## **VOICES FROM KAREN STATE**

Since December 15, 2021, the Burmese military has shelled civilian areas in the Dooplaya District. With each passing day, the military attacks have not ceased, but rather intensified. On December 23, several reports of multiple civilian casualties poured in due to the airstrikes. As of December 28, over 10,000 civilians are currently displaced in multiple locations.

Sister Paw Eh fled her home when junta forces entered Lay Kay Kaw and fighting ensued between the local EAO, KNLA, and the Burmese military. Sister Paw Eh shares that she, as well as her entire village, were forced to leave their homes and livelihood behind. They fled with absolutely nothing. Since the villagers fled before they could sell any of their crops from the season, they do not have the means to get the supplies they need in order to survive.

When the fighting first happened, Grandmother Toe Noe hoped they were going to stay in their homes. However, that hope was short-lived when they heard gunfire near the village. In the middle of the night, her village was told to move to safety as fighting was getting closer to the village edge. They soon arrived at one of the many displacement locations supported by the Karen Human Rights Group.

Sister Naw Wah wants the international community to help the people of Burma. All they want is peace. Sister Naw Wah says that everyone wants the Burmese military to return to where they come from. Before the coup, the people in Sister Naw Wah's village were able to live and work in peace. That brief period gave the villagers a glimpse of what life can be for them. Now, they are forced to live in constant fear. Fear that the Burmese military will come to their areas to destroy their homes and anything the villagers hold dear.

**\*Name changed to protect their identity.**



*Villagers fled their homes and surrounding areas to multiple displacement camps.*

*Photo Cred: RFA*

While volunteer groups and Karen CSOs are working diligently to provide necessary aid and assistance to the IDPs, they can only do much. As armed conflict escalates in the region and the number of IDPs continues to swell, more humanitarian aid is needed to support the displaced persons in Karen state. Access to additional aid from humanitarian organizations has proven difficult as the junta regime has blocked or banned access to impacted communities putting more strain on the local CSOs.

The people of Burma have repeatedly asked for aid and assistance from the international community with very little response or action. International intervention is a must and tangible action needs to be imposed to prevent further death and destruction at the hands of the military regime. As evidenced in Karenni state with the massacre of 35 people, including 2 staff members from Save the Children, the military regime does not care and will go to any lengths to eradicate opposition, including any unarmed civilians that bear witness to their crimes.

# **AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA**

## **CHIN**

The village of Thatlang, a stronghold for resistance forces, has been repeatedly set on fire. Many of its 10,000 inhabitants have fled, leaving it relatively uninhabited. About a quarter of the village's 2,000 buildings have been [burned](#). Data and past history indicates that the fires were set intentionally by the military. Cian Sian Sum, leader of PDF Zoland, was [assassinated](#) on Dec 5, sparking a war with the Zomi Revolutionary Army. Over a dozen new Chinland Defense Forces have [sprouted up](#) to battle military reinforcements in the area and support the Chin National Front. A missionary that was arrested on Dec 11 was [found dead](#) on the side of a road with bullet wounds two days later. Since the second week of Dec, there have been daily armed clashes between the Burmese military and CDF. In addition to armed conflict, the Burmese military also arbitrarily arrested 4 civilians from Shet, Vawmm'tu and Htar Laung villages. On Dec 28, 2 burned bodies were discovered by Shet village - one identified as a missing CDF member and the other was a civilian.

## **KACHIN**

In a Hpakant jade mine, searches were called off after a [massive landslide](#) left up to an estimated 70 missing and 6 confirmed dead. These landslides are unfortunately frequent in this region, and many poor workers in search of money fall victim. Additionally, following an attack on a military camp by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Mohnyin district, [fighting](#) erupted in the area. In response, the military used fighter jets to counterattack. On Dec 27, [armed conflict](#) also erupted between the KIA and pro-junta People's Militia Force (PMF) in Hpakant township. The Burmese military later reinforces the PMF by firing artillery at the KIA. Additionally, the collapse of the healthcare system, especially the National AIDS Control Program, has been [detrimental](#) for HIV/AIDS patients. The program, which was in development for around 20 years, and the fall of stability has resulted in the deaths of many patients.

## **KARENNI**

Armed conflict continues to intensify in Loikaw and Demoso townships as [10 villages](#) were forced to evacuate for safety. As thousands are forced to flee their homes all over Karenni state, the junta is [blocking roads](#) to prevent life-saving humanitarian aid from reaching IDPs. On Dec 24, Burmese troops conducted a [clearance operation](#) in Moso village, Hpruso Township. They arrested 35+ individuals, including women, children, and the elderly, and burned them alive in vehicles. Two staff members from Save the Children came upon the clearance operation after delivering aid relief in another area. Initially reported missing, Save the Children [confirmed](#) their deaths on Dec 28. The charred remains were discovered and identified by local civilians and the KNDF. On Dec 31, the Burmese military deployed 2 [fighter jets](#) to reinforce ground forces fighting anti-junta forces. The jets targeted the Demoso township area and dropped at least 2 bombs.

## **MON**

Daw Mar Mar Khine, a former member of the Lower House of Parliament, was [sentenced](#) to a year of hard labor for participating in the anti-military movement on Dec 1. Soldiers indiscriminately arrested 17 people after a bomb exploded at a restaurant in Thaton on Dec 4. Dr. Chan Myae Aung, a charity doctor working in Mawlamyine, was [arrested](#) for supporting the NUG on December 5. A [battle](#) between the Karen National Union and military forces near the villages of Lane Maw Chan and Kanin Kamaw on December 7 forced villagers to flee their homes. On Dec 17, artillery shells [fired by the military](#) during a battle with the Karen National Liberation Army killed two civilians and caused over 500 villagers to flee the area. The budget for ethnic affairs in Mon State was [cut in half](#) from \$400 million Kyat (\$222,490 USD) to \$200 million Kyat (\$111,245 USD).



## KAREN

In Karen state, the [fighting](#) in Lay Kay Kaw between the Karen National Liberation Army and the Burma Army in Myawaddy Township ensued after a military raid resulted in 30 people arrested, including a former National League for Democracy MP. Once the military began firing artillery towards the town, nearly the entire village population was displaced, with around 7,000 villagers fleeing across the Moei River into Thailand. This prompted the UN to [request](#) that Thailand give them “urgent access” to the fleeing civilians to provide aid. In total, the [fighting](#), which lasted from Dec 23-26, was thought to have displaced over 10,000 people. Mountainous areas in Northern Karen state are subjected to [extreme temperatures](#), including close to freezing weather in the winter. IDPs lack warm clothes and medicine, as well as risk contracting infectious diseases.

## SHAN

Three Shanni journalists and a family member who were [detained](#) on March 24 by the junta were recently sentenced to three years in prison for spreading misinformation. The junta has been targeting those with anti-military agendas and unfairly imprisoning them. People’s Defense Forces (PDF), especially in Shan State, have also been increasingly targeted by the junta, and according to the Southern Shan State Generations, local pro-junta militias have been pressured to “clear the territory” of any resistance forces. [Deaths](#) of alleged military informers have been rising due to increased tensions between the military and the civilian population. According to the junta, over two dozen villagers were allegedly killed by the PDF, but sources confirm that the military-affiliated Pyu Saw Htee militia was responsible. On Dec 20, it was [confirmed](#) that U Mg Yo and U Soe Tint from Shwe Pyi Aye village, were tortured to death after they were forced to be human shields by Burmese troops in October. On Dec 21, the Burmese military [arrested](#) 6 cowherds while raiding See Mee Lock village.

## RAKHINE

Junta forces are increasingly arresting individuals in Rakhine for supposedly funding the PDF. On Dec 3, Aye Myint Myat Aung was [arrested](#) at a residential compound for healthcare workers where she was staying with family. The Burmese military accused Aye Myint Myat Aung of financially supporting the PDF, an accusation strongly refuted by her family. On Dec 14, Burmese troops [arrested](#) social worker Min Ko Oo for allegedly financing the PDF in central Burma. He was charged with Section 50j of the Counterterrorism Law, which could potentially sentence Min Ko Oo to 10 years in prison. In northern Rakhine, a township court [sentenced](#) 199 people, majority of whom were Rohingya from Maungdaw fleeing persecution, to 5 years in prison for illegally trying to migrate to Malaysia. This is the maximum sentencing allowed under the Immigration Act.

## CENTRAL BURMA

After PDF carried out bombings and targeted assassinations of junta-appointed officials, Burmese troops killed [11 villagers](#) in retaliation near Monwa in Saigaing Region on Dec 7. The junta [launched](#) a brutal attack on Ke Bar village in Saigaing region on Dec 13, demanding information about PDF forces. Afterwards, they burned half of the buildings in the village. The junta attacked Hnan Khar village in Magway Region with helicopters on Dec 17, [killing at least nine](#) and causing nearly 1,000 villagers to flee, burning three buildings, and destroying over \$11,000 worth of food. Reports have emerged that the military tortured and murdered [at least 40 civilians](#) in Saigang District in July as a retaliation against attacks by PDF militia groups. Four female lawyers in the Mandalay Region working as defense attorneys in political cases were [arrested](#) on Dec 19. Their whereabouts are unknown.