



ON-THE-GROUND IN BURMA

A DIGITAL BRIEFER

Issue 12 | January 31, 2022

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- Evidence shows the brutal [torture](#) taking place in Mandalay Palace, Burma’s most notorious interrogation center.
- [PM Hun Sen's](#) failure to meet with all parties to the conflict in Burma shows clear authoritarian orientation.
- [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) was sentenced to four more years for having walkie talkies and breaking COVID-19 protocol.
- U.S. companies are bypassing sanctions and purchasing teak, which indirectly [fund](#) the Burmese military junta.
- The Burmese junta now represents the country in the Rohingya genocide case at the [ICJ](#).
- Chevron and TotalEnergies [exit](#) from Burma, but activists warn oil companies must also stop funding the Burmese junta.
- The International Crisis Group listed [Burma](#) on its list of 10 crisis areas in the world for 2022.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



2-4 ANALYSIS
Explore USCB's latest analysis that reviews the events over the last year since the Feb 1st Coup.

5 ONE YEAR REFLECTION
Ti Reh, a Karenni refugee and community leader, reflects over the events happening in Burma since the Feb 1st Coup.

6-7 OVERVIEW OF STATES/REGIONS

• Chin	6	• Mon	6
• Kachin	6	• Rakhine	7
• Karen	7	• Shan	7
• Karenni	6	• Central Burma	7

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Impose immediate targeted sanctions on the Myanma 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

One Year Later: The Burmese junta continues its brutal campaign on the people

As the February 1st coup hits the one year mark, the people of Burma continue to fight for their basic human rights and an inclusive democracy. However, the Burmese junta has not given up the war. Instead, they are intensifying their attacks on the civilians in order to cut down and eradicate all anti-junta opposition. As the international community issues condemnations, junta forces continue to carry out crimes against humanity, war crimes, and human rights violations with impunity. The international community must intervene to end the junta's cycle of violence, ensure justice for the victims, and hold the junta accountable for its crimes.

A Year in Review

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



11,950+
Arrests



8,930+
Detained



1,510+
Killed



1,970+
Warrants



400,000
IDPs



1.6 million
Lost their jobs



8,537
Military Attacks on
Civilians



415+
Attacks on
Healthcare workers

“

“That was the day I saw dead bodies en masse who were murdered in the cruelest and most inhumane manner I have ever seen in my entire life.”

A doctor after performing autopsies on bodies from the Karenni Massacre

”

February 1, 2022 marks one year since the military coup ended Burma's brief period of quasi-civilian rule. As the third in a series of coups since 1962, the military has responded with brutal violence against peaceful protesters and continues the torture and murder of unarmed civilians in an effort to wipe out resistance. Much has changed in the past year - [1.6 million people](#) lost their jobs, and more than [1,500 civilians](#) were killed, including [over 100 children](#). Schools remain closed, placing the futures of young people in jeopardy.

The military junta has carried out numerous airstrikes across the country, especially in the ethnic states, leading to huge numbers of displacement - [over 400,000](#) have been displaced since the coup. This adds to previous displacements of half a million inside the country before the coup. Thousands of refugees have also crossed to neighboring countries, with instances where the military fired [artillery](#) across the Thai-Burma border in order to hit refugee camps.

The healthcare system in Burma is also in shambles- [healthcare workers](#) are actively targeted by the military junta for participating in the peaceful Civil Disobedience Movement or for treating injured protesters. There have been over 415 cases of attacks against healthcare workers, the highest recorded number of attacks in the world in 2021. There has also been more than 100 deaths in military [custody](#), as well as documented torture against civilians, including politicians, poets, journalists, protesters, and [children](#).

Targeted by military forces, Karenni State has been the site of [numerous](#) daily civilian casualties and the [displacement](#) of over half of the region's population. Reports of the military attacking fleeing refugees and IDPs have also surfaced. The most notable crime against humanity to come out of the state is the Karenni [massacre](#). Over 35 civilians, including two staffers from Save the

Children, were forcibly tied up and burned alive on December 24, 2021.

In other regions in southeast Burma, displacement has continued due to escalating attacks by the junta. The Human Rights Foundation of Monland documented over [1000 cases](#) of violence against civilians in the regions of Mon, Karen, and Dawei. In Karen State, the [Karen Human Rights Group](#) recorded over 100,000 new IDPs between April 2021 and January 2022 who have sought shelter in KNU-controlled areas. These displaced villagers face difficulties surviving with food shortages in the midst of continuing artillery bombardments.



Villagers from Lay Kay Kaw, Karen state rest in Mae Sot, Thailand

Photo cred: Chiraunth Rungjamratsami/AP

In northwest Burma, humanitarian issues continue to be perpetrated in Chin state as the Burmese military conducts clearance operations. The most notable target of the clearance operations is [Thantlang](#) Township. The Burmese military's assault led to the displacement of the entire town's population of 10,000 residents. Over the course of three months, the military's [arson](#) attacks resulted in the burning of [900+](#) houses and seven religious buildings. The military is also actively murdering civilians, including children.

Meanwhile, Rakhine State has faced growing security restrictions and rising tensions between the Burmese military and the Arakan Army, while 200+ members of the Rohingya community were [arrested](#) for violating traveling restrictions. Some

of the arrested Rohingya were sentenced to five years in jail - a much harsher punishment than the suggested two years. The military arresting civilians for allegedly financing the PDF is another rising trend in Rakhine state.

[Sagaing](#) and Magway regions have also seen escalated [violence](#) - the military is systematically murdering civilians through [burning](#) and torture. As the flames of revolution grow, the military is increasing its brutal attacks. Over [30,000](#) people were forced to flee their homes in Pauk Township, Magway region. Previously untouched before the coup, the military have been launching [airstrikes](#) in these regions. Shan State also faces continuing violence - armed clashes between the junta forces and EAOs have led to villagers, including children, being injured by military shells. The military is also [abducting](#) civilians to use as human shields as added protection. In efforts to over take EAOs in Kachin state, junta forces engage in armed clashes and launch [airstrikes](#) that have resulted in the displacement of [3,200](#).

Despite these circumstances, however, there is hope and bravery in ordinary civilians across Burma. The people continue to resist creatively and courageously in the face of ruthless oppression. Those in positions of power within the international community need to enact tangible action to support Burma's revolution rather than issue statements of condemnation that serve no one. Young people are putting their lives on the line and training with ethnic resistance armies, yet the UN issues empty calls for cessation of violence "on all sides" without protecting those who are disproportionately abused by Burma's military.

From peaceful protests to taking bullets with homemade shields, the people of Burma are engaging in armed resistance in light of the international community's lack of protection.

Despite constant calls for aid and explicit evidence of the severity of the Burmese military's crimes, international actors' inaction borders on complicity in crimes against humanity in Burma. The military does not seek to surrender any of its power, and no negotiations can be made with a regime that willingly uses arms and airstrikes against its civilians.

The ASEAN five-point consensus has also failed to result in any improvements, and members of ASEAN should be aware of the implications of the prolonged military coup in Burma, which would [harm](#) them as well. ASEAN's lack of pressure is representative of an organization that is ill-prepared to act in times of crisis, especially as some ASEAN members are still intent on continuing business ties with Burma, notably [Thailand's PTT](#) oil firm. International organizations, including the UN, need to realize by now that alternative means of action must be taken. Over 7 decades of military rule in Burma has passed, with any dreams of improved freedom and democracy now completely destroyed.

If the international community wishes to help Burma as much as they state they do, listening to the people of Burma is the least they can do. A global arms embargo needs to be implemented swiftly, as this would stop the military's supply of weapons that are responsible for the murder of civilians. Given the desperate situation of thousands of IDPs across the country, it is crucial to increase cross border and humanitarian aid, as well as ensure access to the life-saving resources.

It is long past the time for action, and the situation in Burma worsens day by day. International organizations, policymakers, and member states should also step out of their decades of inaction and stop a violent, turbulent military junta that has only sparked fear and bloodshed for over 70 years

REFLECTION ON THE COUP

Written By: Ti Reh, a Karenni refugee and community leader in the US

It has been a year since the coup on February 1, 2021. What is happening to us, the people of Burma, cannot be explained in even the worst possible terms. Besides the majority Burmese ethnic group, other ethnicities saw the coup coming before February 1—Burma's ethnic nationalities have long been persecuted by the military, enough to recognize the strong potential of a coup.

I was not alive to experience the 1988 coup, but I was two years old when I fled on my poor mother's back during ethnic cleansing in Karenni state in 1996. Growing up in a Karenni refugee camp, I heard many stories about how the Burmese used their military superiority to break peace deals and commit ethnic cleansing against the Karenni people.

My father had seen and experienced the brutality of the Burmese military. My father knew nothing but farming and raised his family living in the village, nowhere near the cities. My father was not a threat or harmful in any way to the military because he was not a part of any of the resistance forces—he was merely a farmer. But along with many of his villagers, the regime captured, tortured, and used them as human shields to carry their weapons. So, in the weeks before the coup, upon hearing about the election complaints, I told myself that the same thing that happened in 1988 could happen again very soon.

I was not surprised, but I was extremely sad when the coup started on February 1, 2021, while sitting in my Zoom class. I could not concentrate on my school tasks. The stories from my father played in my head every day after the coup and during the peaceful protest period. Like my old self, I was afraid that more two-year-old children would have to be carried by their parents to flee war. Like my father, I was scared more farmers would lose their farms and homes to the war. I was scared that innocent civilians would be captured, tortured, killed, and used as human shields for the war. Months after the coup, all these inhumane actions were committed again by the Burmese military all over the country.

In Karenni State, the Burmese military (Tatmadaw) violates human rights daily. On December 24 in Pruso township, at least 35 people, including two humanitarian workers from Save the Children and one child, were captured, tied up and burned to death in a Burmese military truck. A total of 49 innocent civilians were arrested and used as human shields on five occasions in Karenni state alone: 1 in Pruso, 1 in Demosa, 1 in Loikaw, and 2 in Pehko township. Of the 49, two people have died. At least 654 homes and other properties are recorded to be destroyed, with the number still rising as a result of the military's artillery, airstrikes, and arson. 95,000 internally displaced peoples have been confirmed and recorded in Karenni, but people are still fleeing the war every day.

Those forcibly displaced constantly risk death and nowhere is safe for them: they survive on limited food, water, medicine, and essentials. On June 15, 2022, the Burmese used a military jet to intentionally drop a bomb on a displaced peoples camp, resulting in the deaths of a child, one teenager, and one elder. Since the coup, the military's indiscriminate shooting and murders have killed over 152 people in Karenni State. While local human rights groups record these numbers, the military prohibits any recording of events or news in the state, making it extremely likely that the death toll is much higher than reported.

One year has passed since the coup and countless civilians have died since February 1, 2021. Many more innocent civilians will continue to die in the future if the UN, ASEAN, and other international entities do not intervene to help the people of Burma. The resistance is getting stronger as time goes, and the coup leaders and its military are desperate to hold onto their power and will continue to commit mass atrocities against civilians and ethnic minorities. To conclude this reflection of mine, I beg the UN, ASEAN, US, and other countries to sanction the military's arms and personal businesses and stand with the people of Burma.

[AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA](#)

[CHIN](#)

[Fighting](#) between the military and resistance groups such as the People's Defense Force (PDF) and the Chinland Defense Force intensified at the beginning of January. On January 6, a battle between the villages of Kihlung and Lonhlaw in Matupi township forced villagers to flee their homes. Soldiers arrested and summarily [executed](#) ten civilians, including a 13-year-old boy, whose throat was slashed near Kihlueng village in Matupi township on January 8. Also among the victims was Pu Tui Dam, a journalist who was the founder and chief editor of Khonumthung Media Group. Over 1,000 people from six villages in the area fled in response to these murders. Starting on January 8, a series of [battles](#) near Falam Township in northern Chin State displaced over 3,000 people. During the battles, junta soldiers indiscriminately fired artillery shells. Ministers from the National Unity Government said on January 20 that evidence of atrocities in Chin State will be used in international [court cases](#) against the junta.

[KACHIN](#)

In early January, Northern Kachin state saw [fighting](#) between junta troops and armed groups, such as the PDF-Putao and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The KIA has been taking economic action against the junta in Myitkyina township, where they [banned shops](#) from selling junta-related goods. They also [banned gold extraction](#) from its regions of control. A KIO spokesperson has acknowledged that gold extraction has led to the loss of natural resources, environmental damage, and the loss of IDPs' land. The Catholic minority of Kachin state has also vowed to [offer humanitarian support](#) to IDPs living within the bounds of their parish. Estimates [report](#) that over 106,800 IDPs existed in Kachin state prior to 2021, with more recent numbers adding another 3,200 IDPs due to recent conflict in December 2021 alone. On January 12, the Burmese military [arrested](#) a teacher who joined the CDM and charged others after they refused to return to their jobs.

[KARENNI](#)

Humanitarian assistance is urgently needed in Karenni State, where there are over [170,000](#) IDPs. The people are fleeing from major conflict and airstrikes, which has claimed the lives of many IDPs, including [children](#). A [clash](#) between anti-junta resistance forces and junta soldiers occurred north of Loikaw on January 6. Since then, the [escalating situation](#) has led to most of Loikaw's 50,000 residents fleeing their homes, with the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force offering assistance. At the end of January, urban warfare encompassed Loikaw. The military regime is using the "four-cut" strategy on Loikaw, [cutting off](#) water, internet, and electricity. Meanwhile, volunteers in southern Shan State are facing difficulties in providing aid to the [growing number](#) of displaced people from Karenni state. According to colleagues on the ground, a large number of Karenni IDPs seek refuge at the Thai-Burma border, however they are continuously pushed back by Thai authorities.

[MON](#)

Junta forces [installed](#) a CCTV system at every street intersection in Mawlamyine that allows them to monitor civilians' movement, as well as target and arrest activists. Junta authorities in major Mon State cities, such as Mawlamyine, Thanbyuzayat, and Ye, are now conducting [night searches](#). Anyone they suspect with connections to the PDF or involved in the CDM movement is arrested and their phones are searched for incriminating evidence. Those who refuse to cooperate are shot. On January 19, a landmine [killed](#) an 8-year-old girl in Kyaikmaraw Township. On January 25, [armed conflict](#) between the Burmese military and the KNLA forced hundreds of civilians to flee from Kyaikto Township. [Drones](#) were banned after PDF forces used them to carry bombs and attack the military.

KAREN

After experiencing heavy losses on the frontline, the junta military is [reportedly](#) resorting to airstrikes and artillery over direct fighting to prevent further loss. Defections are now prevalent, and the military is trying to recruit others to replace the loss of soldiers. However, military offensives in Karen state have caused tens of thousands of people to flee, some of whom have fled to Thailand. Local Thai and Burmese government officials are reportedly planning to send IDPs back over the border into Burma, which has sparked concerns for arrest and detainment. Sources also stated that the junta plans to [carry out](#) a large-scale attack on the KNLA and anti-coup forces in resistance regions. The UNHCR [estimates](#) that there are over 52,100 IDPs in Karen state that remain unable to access humanitarian aid because of blocks from the Burmese military and ongoing clashes. Southeastern Burma, including Karen state, recorded the highest increase in IDPs between February and December 2021.

SHAN

On January 5, civilians were [injured](#) when fighting between the Burmese military and the TNLA broke out in Namkham township. To protect the oil and gas pipelines running through Hsipaw Township in northern Shan state, junta forces planted [landmines](#) around the pipelines. Dangerous conditions within the Mong Kung township, including a number of [landmine detonations](#), have caused a number of people to be injured. One man's body was left to rot because villagers were unable to collect his body due to fears of additional detonations. Additional fighting in northern Shan State between armed groups caused villagers to flee to Kyaukme town, which means that they are [unable to harvest](#) their crops that they rely on for the rest of the year. Due to the armed conflict, there are about 14,400 IDPs in Shan state. Military airstrikes and artillery attacks against the KNDF caused many from Loikaw townships to flee to [Shanni IDP camps](#).

RAKHINE

After a [stand-off](#) between junta forces and the Arakan Army near Kyauktaw township, locals left the region due to fears that a major clash may occur. Throughout Rakhine state, travel has become more difficult due to [security checkpoints](#) - travelers must take off their masks and get out of their vehicles. The Burmese military also placed more restrictions on the [transportation of rice](#) in Dar Let Chaung village-tract, which negatively impacted residents who rely on rice from other townships. Meanwhile, on January 16, seven Muslim men and two youth under 15-years-old were [arrested](#) at a checkpoint in Ann Township while traveling to Yangon for work. Landmines and bombs from previous years of fighting between the Arakan Army and the military continue to [harmfully impact](#) civilians and have since caused 149 injuries and 54 deaths.

CENTRAL BURMA

Two teenagers were detained on January 4 in Taze Township, Sagaing Region. They were [tortured](#) by soldiers and featured in a propaganda video. 13 men from Letpan village in Mandalay Region were [arrested](#) by soldiers on January 18. Four of them were killed at the interrogation center. Soldiers explained that they "accidentally" used too much force. An intense [battle](#) with resistance forces broke out on January 22, just north of Katha in Sagaing Region. Bombs and stray bullets from the conflict injured locals and killed one man. In the past few weeks, fighting in Katha Township has intensified as the military bombs villages and resistance groups ambush military supply lines. Over 2,000 villagers in Saigaing's Shwebo Township fled their homes after soldiers [burned](#) their villages on January 24 in retaliation to a PDF attack.