



# October & November 2021

Women's League of Burma (WLB)

Over the last few months in Burma/Myanmar, women and young girls have been terrorized by the junta through rising reported cases of rape and sexual violence. The Women's League of Burma has noted on multiple occasions that since the failed coup, violence against women has been **increasing**. In the ten months which have passed, the military junta has been committing at least nine conflict-related **sexual** violence against women. There are a multitude of fears facing women and a worrying lack of options where they can seek protection and justice.

The human rights situation in Burma/Myanmar has left millions struggling to survive as the Burmese military continues to unleash its brutality. The junta is perpetrating systematic, widespread attacks while a full-fledged war is pushing the population further into poverty on a daily basis. Livelihoods have effectively been halted by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing internal conflict.



**1,299**  
KILLED



**93**

**10,568**  
ARRESTED

**1,395**

The number of those arrested by the regime is increasing daily. Those imprisoned since the attempted coup are largely human rights defenders and activists who have stood tall in the wake of violence in defiance of the military's authoritarianism and draconian policies. Among those behind bars are 1,395 women. Many detained are the family members of those wanted by the regime who were not home when security forces came to arrest them. This includes young children and the elderly.



Alongside growing numbers of arbitrary arrests, is the alarming rate of those being killed. As the hostilities between the Burmese Army and armed groups intensify, it is local people who carry the burden of war in every aspect. A defining characteristic of these military offensives is the relentless use of widespread and systematic sexual violence against ethnic women, which amounts to crimes against humanity under international human rights law. There are at least 93 women who have lost their lives to the junta.

# 1 Impact of the Military Coup

Ongoing military offensives by the junta have threatened civilian safety and exacerbated protection gaps. In areas where civilian armed defense forces are particularly active, the regime has scaled up its attacks. Warrantless arrests by the Burmese Army have been accompanied by indiscriminate firing into villages. People of all ages are being targeted and subsequently tortured - often to death as has been the case in places including Sagaing Region and Chin State. On September 7, an offensive campaign was **announced** by the National Unity Government. Since then, clashes have increased at an unprecedented level which has seen an uptick in killings and sexual violence.

Sexual violence against women in a conflict occurs in both private and public areas. Impunity for these crimes is systematically entrenched, forcing ethnic women to live with their trauma and carry on without adequate justice, accountability, counseling, or resources. A 62-year-old woman from Kutkai Township was **raped** at her home on November 7. A few days later, the mother of a one-month-old child was repeatedly **raped** by junta soldiers in front of her husband at gunpoint in Aklui village, Tedim Township in Chin State. The same evening, the victim's 30-year-old sister-in-law, who was seven months pregnant, was also **raped** by the Burmese soldiers.

Harrowing reports **emerged** of the torture tactics used by the junta in an attempt to traumatize victims and their families to curb dissident. The attacks are taking place in lawless vicinities where military intelligence officers extract information from detainees by any means possible. Survivors **attested** that they had been beaten, electrocuted, **denied** food and water and subjected to mock executions. There have also been emerging reports from female detainees who were sexually assaulted by

the prison guards during their integrations. In addition, women have been denied bathing water and medical care, leading to the spread of diseases and sickness. One woman from Insein prison **recalled** a fellow detainee who had died from being denied treatment when she became ill.

LGBTQ activist and transgender woman, Saw Han Nway Oo, was violently arrested on October 2 after security forces **abducted** her at home. She was interrogated at a military camp inside Mandalay Palace where she was tortured for two days. After the case was dropped and released on October 19, she recalled being beaten with sticks and gun stocks, being slapped and having hot water poured all over her body. When she was transferred to Obo prison, the soldiers forced her to dress as a man and put her in a cell with other men. She was dehumanized and humiliated.

The regime continues to embark on warrantless arrests and raids. Four people, including three women in Mandalay, were **detained** because their family members were not home when the junta arrived to arrest them. The mother, age 50, of one of the wanted individuals, initially refused to let the soldiers enter her home to give her son a chance to escape. She was then brutally beaten for providing him with an opportunity to evade arrest. This was not an isolated incident. On multiple occasions, the junta has responded by **physically assaulting** elderly women and children. In a raid in Mandalay, a **70-year-old woman** was beaten so badly she had bruises overtaking her entire body. A 5-year-old girl was also struck by the soldiers during the attack. Another woman, a teacher who had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), was **shot** and killed by the junta in Sagaing region when the junta came to arrest her brother-in-law who was not home.

Even children are being taken away to various prisons if their parents or siblings are in hiding and facing charges by the regime. On October 9, a mother and her two children (aged 2 and 6) were **taken as hostages** in Saw Pyar village, in Dawei region. A 7-year-old child of a journalist was **interrogated** by junta forces in Yangon who questioned if the young girl had witnessed her mother buying guns. Those as young as five years old have been violated in their homes, hospitals and schools. The former UN Special Envoy on Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid **called** on the junta to stop violating the rights of children. An international rights group, Save the Children, **echoed** calls expressing worry about the use of heavy weapons, which has killed and injured young people, and devastated communities. More than 76,000 children have been **displaced** by violence since February and 100 have been killed by the junta.

# 2

## Impacts of Military Offensives and Human Rights Violations in Ethnic Areas

Rampant internal conflict has not slowed, nor shown any signs of stopping. Civilians in areas where clashes are frequent are being subjected to state-sponsored atrocities. In desperate attempts to seek safety, dozens have been killed or captured and tortured to death in military custody. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the humanitarian crisis in Burma/Myanmar.

Families are facing profound food insecurity as internally displaced people (IDPs) struggle to survive. Before the coup, 497,200 people had been displaced. Since then, the number has grown to 881,927, according to the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar. Half of the population in Burma/Myanmar is **projected** to be in poverty by 2022. In a bid to provide relief, the National Unity Government (NUG) has **appealed** to Thailand to help distribute cross-border aid and has reinforced calls to the international community for assistance.

### CHIN STATE

The Burmese Army ramped up attacks in Chin State as the junta **prepared** for major offensives against the Chin civilian defense forces. Militarization has devastated the small state with the human rights violations committed amounting to war crimes. More than 160 homes and at least two churches were **burned** to the ground in Thantlang Township during a scorched earth campaign. The damage forced thousands from their homes with two dozen children feared to be stuck at an orphanage in the town. Approximately 30,000 people in Chin State have been **forced** to flee to neighboring India, with 20 percent of the state being displaced by conflict.

Satellite imagery from Human Rights Watch examining the month of fires **concluded** that the scorching of homes and institutions was intentional. Chin human rights groups and civil society have **condemned** the attacks and called for action at the United Nations Security Council.

Ongoing fighting and shelling have added to the struggles of daily life which have become challenging and unpredictable. On October 16, a six-year-old girl was **killed** when an artillery shell exploded in a hut she was in. Artillery shelling continued unabated throughout November. A young girl

was **struck** on November 13 by mortar shelling fired by the junta sustained injuries in Thantlang while attempting to retrieve her belongings after being forced to flee offensives.

Travel has become a nightmare for civilians who are threatened by soldiers at various checkpoints across the country. A heavily pregnant woman was **shot** by the junta in their family car while on the way for a routine checkup at a local clinic. She later succumbed to her wounds, but her unborn child survived and is being kept alive in a feeding tube.

## KACHIN STATE

The prevalence of using civilians as human shields is ongoing in Kachin State. A youth was **abducted** by the junta and forced to lead a column of 100 soldiers. Despite pleas from elders in the community to release the victim, the junta refused to do so unless the Kachin Independence Army stopped attacking them. Women and children were also **used** as human shields during fighting in Momauk. Over 30 civilians were detained by a column of 100 Burmese Army soldiers who fired indiscriminately into the main roads.

Internet access in Hpakant remains cut off by the junta who are using the lack of connection to continue to perpetuate widespread human rights abuses.

As the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic take a toll on local populations, pregnant women exposed to the virus are not receiving adequate treatment or nutrition. They along with children and the elderly are not only malnourished but also have difficulty accessing basic necessities. As a result of COVID-19 and political instability, negative coping mechanisms have been adopted, such as men increasing their alcohol consumption, which poses a risk to the safety of women. As the economic crisis unfolds, women are threatened with both psychological and physical security.

## KAREN STATE

The Burmese Army is continuing to send large numbers of military reinforcements into Karen areas. Soldiers are attacking villages through ongoing fly-overs by helicopters and drones as they search for civilians and burn down their homes and entire villages. Villagers are **forced** to go with the Burmese Army to their camps and are used as human shields. Over 400 villagers have been **abducted** by the junta and their Border Guard Force to use as guides and porters for them through Karen State.

Civilians and groups continue to be arbitrarily arrested and killed by the Burmese military. In an attempt to seek safety from the junta, a family hid

in a bomb shelter that they had dug to protect themselves in Hpa-An. Four women of the same family **suffocated** in the hole, which was six feet deep and stocked with dry goods. Tragically, they ran out of oxygen while trying to move their belongings to the upper ground.

In Northern Karen State, clashes between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the military junta have **fueled** more anxieties and fears of local villagers who worry they could be killed by airstrikes and ground offensives. In Mutraw (Hpapun) District alone, there are over 82,000 civilians who have been **displaced** by the junta's violence, according to local Karen human rights organizations.

## KARENNI/KAYAH STATE

Clashes in Karenni/Kayah State have had consequential impacts on civilians as fighting between the Karenni People's Defense Forces and the Burmese Army escalate. In retaliation for an attack on a junta convoy on October 26, soldiers responded with artillery shelling which left a woman dead, and at least seven other civilians seriously wounded on the border of Karenni/Kayah and Shan State. Of the town's 1,000 civilians, 20 percent have fled to safety amid rumors that more **soldiers** are approaching.

There are reported cases of increasing maternal deaths occurring as women are forced to give birth in the forest without adequate access to health care. A pregnant woman who had been displaced several times suffered a **miscarriage** during her seventh month while suffering from physical exhaustion and trauma. Sickness is on the rise, and the elderly and the chronically ill are dying. Newborn twins **died** in an IDP camp near Demoso after the mother had complications during birth and was unable to receive treatment in time. Since October 10, nearly 145,000 people (more than half the State's population) had been forcibly displaced by the junta's violence.

In IDP camps, women have been harassed and face a lack of privacy while bathing and dressing. Women are worried and constantly stressed due to a lack of income and their children's education being forcibly put on hold. Women are dealing with an exceptional amount of emotional stress as a result.

## SHAN STATE

Tensions in Shan State continue to be fuelled by rising hostilities between rival Shan armed groups. Despite multiple appeals by local communities and leaders to cease attacks in civilian areas, unabating gunfire and bombings have terrorized the population. On October 4, shelling during fighting with the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and the Shan

State Progressive Party (SSPP) **killed** a villager and injured a woman and two children in southern Shan State.

The junta is also continuing to perpetrate human rights abuses. On October 24, Mu Lwan, a 60-year-old man was **killed** instantly when artillery shells fired by Light Infantry Battalion 422 in Moby Town struck his home. Five civilians, including two children, were injured. In Muse district, six civilians were again **wounded** when artillery shells struck their homes during fighting between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the junta. Residents have been **threatened** with their homes being burnt to the ground if the Burmese Army hears gunfire from opposition armed groups in their villages.

Aid efforts to support IDP camps in northern Shan State have been hampered by political unrest following the coup and pandemic travel restrictions. Over 3,000 people have fled the conflict between the RCSS and SSPP. As people in Shan State struggle with armed conflict, economic instability, and displacement, IDPs are suffering from a scarcity of food assistance. Women who are pregnant, in particular, face challenges in giving birth and require warm clothing and nutritious meals.

## SAGAING REGION

**Aerial** and ground bombings combined with a growing presence of soldiers in local streets has led to an increased displacement in Sagaing region. Those who have stayed in their areas have been subjected to extortion by soldiers who forcefully demand food, money and shelter. Burglary is rampant amid the economic crisis which has left thousands without enough to survive.

Ongoing clashes between the junta and local resistance forces have exacerbated security threats and concerns. On the morning of October 1, five civilians including a five years old child were shot and killed in a field in Khin-u Township while **fleeing** a raid on their village. Over two hundred soldiers were in Pyindaung village seeking out training bases of rival local groups. They threatened to return if they did not find the suspects in question. Troops also stole gasoline, motorcycles and rice. As military operations are stepped up, local people are also being used as **human shields**, including women. May Zin Kyaw, the mother of a 2-year-old child was **shot** in the head and killed during an indiscriminate attack by the military junta in Taze Township, Sagaing Region on November 5.

Female health workers who are treating displaced populations that the junta has violently forced from their homes are being detained by the junta. An activist and graduate of the University of Traditional Medicine, Khin Nyein Lwin, was **detained** by junta troops in Sagaing Region's Ayadaw Township. She had been supplying oxygen during the COVID-19 outbreaks and helping to distribute food, aid and materials.

Nine female medics working with the Kalay People's Defense Force were **captured** during a raid on the PDF base by the military junta. Photos of them in the regime's custody **showed** them with their hands tied behind their backs. One of the women had a bloodstain on her t-shirt. A female medic who was not captured was found at the base and had been **murdered** by the junta. With no information or updates on the well-being of those abducted, their worst has been anticipated. These fears were exacerbated following reports that those captured had been **hospitalized** following beatings while in captivity. All of the young women are under 30 years of age and have been **denied** all contact with their family members.

In response to the tirade of violence being projected by the military junta, an all-women's militia was **formed** in Myaung Township, Sagaing Region. Its establishment is yet another example of how women are challenging traditional gender stereotypes which had previously limited them from the frontlines of combat.

# 3

## Women's Human Rights Defenders

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Burma/Myanmar represent different ethnicities, religions and ages and they are unified in their collective cause to dismantle and delegitimize the junta. In defiance of the regime and their unlawful coup, they have organized, rallied and campaigned for a free, fair and feminist Burma/Myanmar. In response, the junta has jailed them and tried to portray their efforts as illegitimate and illegal.

While several WHRDs were freed during the military's October amnesty, including Thin Thin Aung, dozens more were being arrested as this was taking place. The military deserves no credit nor appreciation for releasing the political prisoners who should have never been detained in the first place. Detained labor activist, Myo Myo Aye, was released after six months in prison, including time in solitary confinement. Despite the mistreatment she faced, a day after she was free, she **returned** to work and continued speaking up for garment workers. She voiced concern and frustration over how laborers are routinely being exploited and their rights curtailed. The work of labor activists is critical and the contributions by leaders such as Myo Myo Aye, are fundamental to advancing the causes and concerns of workers.

Among the young women who have made sacrifices for the Spring Revolution, May Hnin Aye, a teacher who joined the CDM, was **gunned down** by three informers alleged to be working for the junta. While at home, a car



pulled up and three men got out and began shooting. They chased her into her home where she was shot in the arm, thigh and chest. She was among over 200,000 educators across Burma/Myanmar who showed their support for the revolution by joining the CDM.

Despite all the risks, women from all corners of the country and of all ethnic backgrounds continue to provide supports to their community, raise their voices and partake in activities that will bring about peace and democracy in the country.

## ACTIONS BY WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA (WLB) AND HER MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

The many gaps in service protection and civilian safety in Burma/Myanmar have long been filled by women's rights organizations. Their work and that of our sister organizations have been a ray of hope for those across the country who trust their work, compassion and commitment to deliver life-saving materials and running awareness programs to keep them secure.

**The Kachin Women's Association Thailand** provided IDPs with shelter and materials, as well as medicine for COVID-19 relief and protection. They provided food and safe places for women who had been rescued from trafficking. Youth activists involved in the Spring Revolution were provided with somewhere safe to stay and food. KWAT continues to document human rights violations about the current situation.

**The Karen Women's Organization** released human rights updates in Karen State covering **three-month** overviews. KWO **released** a formal message for the 16 Day Campaign to End Gender-Based Violence calling on everyone to have the courage to speak out and stop all forms of violence against women.

**The Karenni National Women's Organization** provided basic food and shelter for refugees and IDPs. They provided items for women and youth including emergency toilets and nutritional support for pregnant women and children.

**The Kayan Women's Organization** visited refugee camps and conducted refugee census by distributing materials, providing counseling, training and monthly meetings. Online meetings were attended to contact allies and network supporters. Medical supplies were also provided.

**The Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization** supported the Civil Disobedience Movement and women human rights defenders through capacity building of local women and providing legal awareness. The group also provided training on CEDAW, gender, violence against women and human rights.

**The Pa-O Women's Union** provided digital security training to human rights defenders on the ground and also provided COVID-19 defense equipment. PWU filmed a short story on violence against women for the 16-day campaign to end gender-based violence. They surveyed health access with local villagers.

**The Shan Women's Action Network** regularly provides support for those involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement and to health workers in the field responding to the gaps in service provision. SWAN provided COVID-19 awareness through videos on social media. SWAN also **issued** a statement on the 16 Day Campaign to End Gender-Based Violence calling for all armed actors to halt hostilities that have killed, injured and displaced civilians in the crossfire.

**Women for Justice** provided support to the Civil Disobedience Movement and supported women human rights defenders.

Though Thin Thin Aung and some women's human rights defenders have been released, in which WLB **expressed** gratitude to all friends, supporters, national and international organizations and individuals who painstakingly campaigned, there are still a lot of work ahead needed to be done. Among many, WLB has **urged** ASEAN to not invite the military junta to their summit to be held on October 25-28. WLB, the Women's Advocacy Coalition Myanmar, and #SistersToSisters **issued** a joint statement in response to the United Nations Security Council's inaction during closed-door meetings on the situation of Burma. There were collective calls for six actions including a comprehensive global arms embargo.

# CONCLUSION:

Despite the horrific incidents which have taken place over the last year, the people of Burma/Myanmar remain resilient. Their resistance to the military junta has propelled the Spring Revolution forward to ensure its ultimate success. WLB has **condemned** the ongoing attacks, including rape and sexual violence, and has called for those responsible to be held accountable through international accountability mechanisms. Impunity for these crimes has long been emboldened by a failure to hold perpetrators responsible. Survivors of such atrocities are bravely speaking the truth to power and doing all they can to advocate for justice for themselves and their communities.

The increased forms of violence being perpetrated are widespread and systematic, as are abductions and the denial of access to legal counsel for detained political prisoners. In the face of darkness, women have stood tall through all the pain and suffering they have themselves endured, as well as their communities. Despite the pain that comes with telling accounts of trauma, survivors are speaking out with the hope that the international community will not turn a blind eye to their suffering. Therefore, it is with the utmost urgency that the UN Security Council move to pass a resolution on Burma/Myanmar which would send a strong signal to the generals that they are not invincible.

## International Community must



**REJECT MILITARY  
COUP/SO-CALLED**  
State Administrative  
Council



**REFERRAL TO ICC**  
for its crimes against  
humanity



**GLOBAL ARMS  
EMBARGO**

- SUPPORT local rights defenders who are providing safe houses/ shelters for peaceful protestors, especially women human rights defenders.
- SUPPORT those in the country with ensuring a political space for women's rights organisations and civil society
- SUPPORT our advocacy to end system of impunity for all forms of violence against women and girls including conflict-related sexual violence and sexual assault & sexual harassment in custody

# WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA

The Women's League of Burma is an umbrella organization comprising 13 women's organizations of different ethnic and political backgrounds. WLB was founded on 9 December 1999.

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