



September 2021

Women's League of Burma (WLB)

In the month of International Day of Peace, under the yearly theme of “recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world,” the people of Burma only experience violence and threats by ongoing conflicts and human rights violations of the junta. The deteriorating human rights situation and political instability has brought Burma/ Myanmar down from rank 126 to 131 in the Global Peace Index, making it the least peaceful country in the Asia Pacific.

As months proceed into the eighth month after the attempted coup, the Burmese junta continues to deprive and deny civilians their right to live freely and in peace. Since the National Unity Government **launched** a people's defensive war, civilian populations have been terrorized more than ever before. Over the last eight months, the regime has **arrested** at least 30 people per day and **dozens** of family members wanted by the regime. At least four women between the ages of 14 and 45 were reported to have been raped by the junta in September.



1,146
KILLED



80

8,584
ARRESTED

1,268

The regime has committed conflict related sexual violence under the cover of an Internet blackout, where currently 25 townships have had their Internet and mobile access **shutdown**. The outages are part of a long-time strategy by the Burmese Army known as the “**four cuts**” when soldiers attempt to cut armed groups and civilians off of funding, food, intelligence and recruits. Making it nearly impossible to access potentially life-saving information is a tool of warfare deployed to isolate populations. Women are more likely to be subjected to sexual violence including rape, harassment and assault under the guise of darkness. The shutdowns come as Burma/

SITUATION UPDATE

Myanmar **fell** by 14 points on internet freedom in an annual global freedom of expression assessment. The onslaught of violence is being perpetrated against civilians with impunity and a grave lack of moral consciousness.

Internal conflict is displacing thousands in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which the regime has taken advantage of to control the populations. Health workers who hold anti-military views continue to be locked up and mercilessly **executed** in the streets.

Grave danger persists for civilians and human rights organizations. Hundreds have been forced into hiding as the junta intensified their crackdown on anyone with affiliations to the pro-democracy movement.

1

Impact of the Military Coup

The consequences of the military coup continue to have ripple effects on women and girls. State-sponsored violence has isolated victims who have been denied all pathways to justice under the regime. The pride and power of the junta is prioritized, rather than the protection of women. Trust in public institutions in Burma/Myanmar has decreased significantly over the last eight months as Burmese Army soldiers have occupied schools, banks, hospitals and the streets armed with live ammunition.

Staying safe and keeping a low profile has become nearly impossible as soldiers routinely violate privacy laws with warrantless raids and often violent arrests. There is overwhelming evidence which reiterates that women and young girls are not safe while in the custody of the junta who are known to use sexual violence to force false confessions and to evoke fear.

On September 28, a young nurse named Khin Khin Kywel was among those tortured on the street in Yangon, and then shot and killed in a heartless, cold assault. On 20 September, three young students from Dawei University were abducted from their homes. They were accused of supporting the Dawei armed resistance group. While in junta custody, Soe Me Me Kyaw, was brutally **interrogated** by military intelligence officers. After which, she attempted to commit suicide by drinking hand-sanitizer in her detention cell. She was referred to a military hospital and the regime has yet to take any accountability for the physical assault ruthlessly perpetrated against her. Sexual violence by the state and military is rampant in Burma/Myanmar where the authorities evade consequences through a disregard for rule of law and extorting those in higher positions of power through extravagant bribes. Over 50 civilians have been **killed**

during military interrogations since the attempted coup.

The gendered impacts of the poorly handled COVID-19 pandemic have led to more discriminatory violence against women. At the expense of expanding the regime's surveillance and control over all sectors, health care workers risk their lives for attending to injured protesters or participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Dr. Aye Nyein Thu, another woman medical professional, is **wanted** by the regime for treating Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Chin State and supporting the resistance movement there. Their attempts to prosecute her come as volunteer health teams are being **arrested** for attempting to facilitate donated items to vulnerable populations displaced by the junta's expanding military operations. At least 250 health workers have been **attacked** and over 25 killed in the time that has elapsed since February.

In addition, two young women aged 21 and 25 have been **detained** by the junta for over a month for attempting to deliver medical supplies for IDPs in Magway region. Their families have been left distraught without any information of their whereabouts. Both women had nursing backgrounds and were regularly attending to the needs of sick and injured civilians.

2

Impacts of Military Offensives and Human Rights Violations in Ethnic Areas

At **least 79** armed clashes between the Burmese Army and armed resistance groups have been recorded over the past eight months. The launching of people's defensive war by the NUG only provokes the junta to indiscriminately attack on the civilians. Across the month of September, systematic state violence included villages being burned to the ground, airstrikes and egregious attacks on innocent civilians as armed resistance groups continue to battle the junta in their respective areas.

The humanitarian crisis has left **three million** people in Burma/Myanmar in urgent need of life-saving support. An estimated **146,300 people** have been internally displaced due to intensified armed clashes since 1 February. Military offensives have had devastating consequences on rural populations who are unable to attend to their livelihoods to survive. Women are bearing the brunt of this burden as they endure physical and mental hardships. They are also subject to orchestrated sexual violence if they are caught while attempting to flee.

CHIN STATE

Homes are set on fire and civilians are attacked. Amid ongoing indiscriminate firing and shelling, the internet outage in several townships of Chin State, put people in a more vulnerable situation. As a result, residents across Chin State are **fleeing** their homes, including to bordering India.

In the towns and IDP camps where families are seeking refuge, needs remain largely unmet. Townships of Mindat and Thantlang have been hit particularly hard where communities are struggling to meet the needs of increasing IDPs amid rising COVID-19 infection. In Hriang Khan Village, over **60 infection** cases were recorded with over 500 IDPs having arrived in recent days. In addition to basic necessities for survival, women's reproductive, psychological and overall well-being is being neglected. Make-shift camps are also being targeted by the regime. The junta's war is depriving them of their dignity and ability to generate an income to secure their livelihoods - all of which disempowers them to make their own choices and live freely.

Burmese soldiers are arresting and detaining local people as they attempt to reach safety. Under the junta's corrupt policies and interference, a new war for survival has been waged upon them. Mass arrests in the state capital city of Hakha have included soldiers conducting random checks to seek out those participating in the CDM. As a result, the numbers of those detained continue to rise. Over 300 Chin civilians have been detained since February 1. Women human rights defenders are being forced underground.

KACHIN STATE

Intensified fighting in Kachin State has harbored a worsening climate of fear for civilians. An ongoing **internet** shutdown in Hpakant looms alongside various armed clashes, making it impossible to share news updates. This is a deliberate act by the junta to weaken the armed resistance movement in the area. For locals, not having a connection could be a life or death situation when it has already become extremely difficult for basic needs to be met. Villagers are being forced to porter and being subjected to war crimes such as rape and torture.

Violence is sending shock-waves of fear across the destabilized region. Indiscriminate firing by the junta led to the death of a woman who was **shot** in the head while attempting to flee violence during fighting between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burma Army in Tanai township. In September, 458 civilians were arrested and 35 killed in Kachin State.

Some homes belonging to displaced villagers have also been destroyed by heavy artillery fire of the military council, while others were reduced to ashes

by firearms. As a result, some displaced groups have no place to live when they return. Elderly people in the IDP camps have a higher mortality rate than before the war. This increase is thought to be due to the suffocation and psychological trauma of the camps. Pregnant women are not able to get proper nutrition due to extremely limited supply. The overcrowded camps and their lack of toilets and privacy has affected the psychological well-being of women.

The political unrest and volatile armed clashes has resulted in new challenges for young women, especially those who have fled to the wilderness, finding it difficult to make ends meet. Women, in particular, are responsible for providing for their families, and the circle of friends is full of debt, leading to social problems.

KAREN STATE

Since February 1, clashes between the Burma Army and the Karen National Union have **displaced** 70,000 civilians. Airstrikes have killed 14 villagers and wounded 28 in Karen territory.

In recent months, the junta and Border Guard Forces (BGF) regularly abduct civilians to porter and use them as **human shields** to avoid being shot at by ethnic armed organizations or being killed by landmines. When women are forced to do so, they are also at risk of being sexually abused and assaulted.

MON STATE

In Mon State also, a Karen BGF **forced** women and children to carry their food and equipment while using them as human shields.

Mon State is not an exception from extrajudicial killing and arbitrary arrest by the junta. In the month of September, a couple walking home from fishing were **shot** at by junta soldiers for no particular reason. The woman, who was five months pregnant, died immediately.

KARENNI/KAYAH STATE

There were 14 women among 139 arrests and 5 women killed out of 75 civilians in Karenni/Kayah State in September where fighting is intensifying on a daily basis in Demoso and Loikaw townships. The heavy fighting including artillery shelling destroyed more than sixty homes. Some of the houses were set on fire and belongings stolen by the military council.

The situation has forced hundreds of thousands to flee amidst growing unmet needs for food. Women and children in IDPs camps are suffering from diarrhea due to malnutrition and a lack of access to health care. In addition, people with chronic illnesses are finding it difficult to survive on the bare minimum, especially with the growing threat of the pandemic.

Like other parts of Burma/Myanmar, the junta continues to block aid routes and impose travel restrictions, preventing the distribution of urgent food, shelter and medicine. The junta laid **landmines** in civilian areas which has contributed to an increase in deaths and casualties. COVID-19 has also made operations for women led civil society organizations more difficult as they struggle to ensure food for vulnerable groups arrives without being intercepted by the junta. The situation worsened IDPs' access to personal protection equipment such as masks and antibodies against COVID-19. At least 40 villagers **displaced** in Demoso Township who fled after military operations between September 7 and 10 were infected with COVID-19.

SAGAING REGION

Several townships in Sagaing Region have continued to be affected by the military coup and the escalated fighting between the junta and local armed resistance groups. Increased military operations have brought forward a tidal wave of violence perpetrated on civilian populations where over 100 residents have been killed and thousands have been forced to flee.

Internet outages in Sagaing Region have exacerbated the fears of young women. **Escaping** to the forest has been a routine for women whenever they hear the sounds of soldiers approaching. They would not return until they are sure that the junta backed security forces have left. In Kale Township, a returning from a farm was shot in the leg by soldiers.

Sexual violence remains a threat to the survival and safety of young women and girls. Four women in Kani township were **raped** between June and September. The stigma women face in reporting is profound. Victim-blaming and a lack of pathways for justice make it difficult for survivors to report. Soldiers verbally assault the women they abused, and threaten them with violent reprisals if they tell anyone what happened to them. The situation has had deeply consequential impacts on the mental and physical well-being of women who have said they feel **'depressed'** and no longer want to live.

Even children are not being spared by the junta's attacks. When military troops raided Aye Chan Thar Sanpya Village in Magway Region's Myaing Township early in the morning, two children who tried to run away were shot at and **killed**.

SHAN STATE

An estimated **18,500** people have been displaced in Shan State since the military coup and are continuously facing a humanitarian crisis. The consistent fighting between the two rival Shan armed groups of Shan State Restoration Council and Shan State Progress Party and offensives between civilian defence groups and the junta have continued to threaten the lives of the people. The fighting between the two Shan armed groups in Mong Kung Township on September 19 once again forced at **least 2,000** villagers who were already displaced by earlier clashes. The recent fighting in Kyaukme Township where Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) also involved, displaced at least 4,000 people.

In the month of September, COVID-19 has hit hard among the populations in IDP camps in Laikha, Kutkai, Kyaukme, Mong Kung and Muse. More than half of the IDP population in Mang Hkar Village, Kyaukme Township and Mongkoe Village, Muse Township **tested positive** for COVID-19. In such crises, women, pregnant women and elderly people are in need of medical care and children lose their right to access education.

3

Women's Human Rights Defenders

As the Women's League of Burma has always stated, women have long been a part of the movement for federal and democratization of the country. The Spring Revolution has documented that women have participated the most in the political history of Burma/Myanmar. As a result, at least 70 women have been killed, more than 1,000 women are being detained, and now 40 percent of whom in the warrant list are women. Despite all these circumstances, women human rights defenders persisted in their cause for freedom, justice and peace.

Women are well-aware of the many challenges they face in the pro-democracy movement. They know the structural institutions and patriarchal figureheads who will only make their work more difficult as they strive to make sure their messages are heard. Aye Nandar Soe, 21, leads the student union at the Sagaing University of Education. She was **apprehended** by the junta at the end of the month and has not been heard from since. Aye Nandar Soe was vocal in her calls against the junta and led several demonstrations condemning the brute force which the regime was perpetuating against civilians, including children.

Ma Pyone Tint, a member of the Tavoyan Women's Union and the Women's

League of Burma was **charged** with the Penal Code in a temporary court established within the prison. She had been held since May 2021 and is among the many unjustly facing charges for her role in supporting the CDM.

Those who are advancing the civilian armed resistance through moral or monetary support have also been targeted by the junta. A young woman named Sandra Win from Pauk, Magway Region, who had raised 18 million Myanmar Kyat (10,000 USD) was **detained** by soldiers at her home. She was found later with a gunshot to her head, dead and with the money taken by the regime.

Women from different backgrounds have come together to support the Spring Revolution. Mya Hnin Ye Lwin is a well-known actress and model who is among the many celebrities to **join** the resistance movement in Burma/Myanmar. There is currently a junta-sponsored warrant for her arrest for participating in the anti-coup protests but she says she is not deterred by the junta's quest to detain and charge her. Quite the contrary, she is mindful of the sacrifices so many before her have made in the fight for freedom and has thus decided to fight alongside them.

Freedom of expression continues to deteriorate under the junta where yet another woman journalist was arrested while in hiding. Ma Thuzar was **arrested** on September 1 and police have denied her family any information of her whereabouts. In Shan State, a woman reporter from Shwe Phee Myay News was also abducted. Many prominent women rights defenders are still unlawfully **imprisoned** by the junta including Thin Thin Aung and Myo Myo Aye. Both women have dedicated their lives to the protection and promotion of women's rights.

While peace and freedom for the people of Burma/Myanmar are still distant, the month of September has brought honor to the country as Esther Ze Naw Bamvo, who is Kachin and Ei Thinzar Maung, who is Shan-ni were **named** among TIME Magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2021. Both women have prevailed in the most difficult circumstances. Esther Ze Naw Bamvo and Ei Thinzar Maung, young woman activists, who led the very first protest on 5 February triggering nation-wide uprising against the military coup, and have continued to use their platforms to speak out against the injustices taking place against innocent civilians.

Ei Thinzar Maung also made history shortly after the National Unity Government was formed by being named the youngest Deputy Minister of Women, Youths and Children Affairs. Their bravery reflects a new and emerging generation in the country that refuses to allow the history of militarized rule to repeat itself.

Eaindra Kyaw Zin, an well-known actress, **won** a top award at a German film festival while behind bars with her husband for her support to CDM. She was one of the most high profile individuals to support the CDM and along with her husband. Now, they both face possible three year prison sentences for urging the public to join the pro-democracy movement. The junta has made it a crime for the work of artists detained to be broadcast and disseminated.

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

The Women's League of Burma has always celebrated calls for the participation of women in peace and security. There are no longer safe spaces to amplify these same messages or organize events because of the increased presence of the junta and security risks. As the junta looks to extend their illegal rule indefinitely, the growing impact on women is worrying.

The Kachin Women's Association - Thailand is focusing on humanitarian work and supporting the Civil Disobedience Movement and human rights defenders. They are providing first aid kit training and documentation training.

The Karenni National Women's Organization provided food, shelter and materials to IDPs including dignity kits for women. KNWO also provides nutritional support for pregnant women and children under the age of two.

The Karen Women's Organization and the Karen Human Rights Group **issued** a joint statement condemning the use of women as human shields in Karen State.

The Kayah Women's Organization visited IDP camps in Demawso Township and provided supplies. Several staff attended a three-day counseling session.

The Pa-O Women's Union convened its seventh conference and supported a small number of those involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement and women human rights defenders. A five-day online training course was conducted for the first time with their members.

The Shan Women's Action Network continues to support some people involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement and health workers in the field to address the lack of healthcare in Shan State. SWAN released informational videos about COVID-19 through SWAN social media channels.

Women for Justice continued to support the Civil Disobedience Movement and funding for the People's Defence Forces. In the IDP camps, they are assisting families who have lost their homes due to the junta's violence in their villages.

CONCLUSION:

The junta's constant resort to violence as a means to stifle dissent has discredited any trust in their ability to protect the people of Burma/Myanmar. There continues to be no security and protection for women. In the eight months which have now passed since the attempted coup, human rights violations remain rampant. Communications and freedom of expression has been weaponized by the junta to commit their systematic offenses under the cover of darkness. Arbitrary arrests of civilians and human rights defenders are happening daily as calls grow louder for the United Nations not to recognize the terrorist regime as legitimate. They must not be allowed to represent Burma/Myanmar on a global stage while they are responsible for the suffering of hundreds of thousands.

As internal conflict engulfs the country, women have been denied access to protection referral pathways in displacement camps and in the places they are seeking refuge. Livelihood challenges amid the pandemic and increasing military presence in ethnic areas is only adding to the growing stress women are experiencing. The burdens they are forced to carry are significant and the added traumas they are overwhelmed with can be life-threatening.

The gaps in service provision and protection continue to be filled by humanitarian organizations and women's organizations who are known and trusted in their communities. This puts a target on their backs and yet they willingly continue to serve despite the risks. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has missed opportunities to support cross border aid by working closely with the junta and through their problematic policy of 'non-interference.'

Women are the backbone of revolutions globally. In Burma/Myanmar, their participation, commitment and courage is a tribute to the sacrifices they have made and continue to make to ensure the military does not succeed in their quest to destroy any hopes for meaningful democracy.

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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