



# FEBRUARY-MARCH 2022

Women's League of Burma (WLB)

As the world's eyes fall on Ukraine, a human rights catastrophe continues to unfold in Burma/ Myanmar. Decades of impunity have fueled a regime that knows no bounds when it comes to violence in the pursuit of power. In its first broad **human rights report** since the coup, the United Nations found the Burmese army has engaged in systematic human rights violations, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Civilians are not being caught in the crossfire, they are being **deliberately targeted** by the Burmese army.

The US State Department's **determination** that the Burmese army committed crimes against humanity and genocide against the Rohingya people in 2017 is welcomed, but long overdue. As each day passes, the junta's policy of systematic violence continues to cause insurmountable suffering across the entire country, specifically in ethnic regions. Over the February and March period, the junta's violent actions demonstrate its continued disregard for the life and dignity of the people

During a raid of Pauk Township in the Magway Region on March 6, the junta **raped** and killed a 42-year-old woman, Daw Aye Aye Win, and then stabbed her three-year-old daughter to death. The junta troops detained 29 villagers, including nine children to use as potential human shields. Among the detainees was Daw Aye Aye Win's 11-year-old daughter, who was found dead three days later.

The use of civilians as human shields is not an isolated incident, but rather a systematic practice of the junta. In late February, the junta detained 80 primary schoolchildren to use as **human shields** during a raid in Sagaing Region's Yinmabin Township. There are at least 85 reported incidents where the junta has **forced individuals** to perform labour and act as human shields. This constitutes serious violations of international humanitarian law, amounting to **war crimes**.

Arson is a hallmark of the Burmese army's operation, burning townships, food stocks, essential provisions for displaced people, and even their victims. As of March 3, 2022, the junta has torched at least **6,158 civilian homes**, mainly in Chin and Karenni/Kayah states and Sagaing and Magway regions.

Injuries and death from **landmines** and other explosive remnants of war (ERW), and unexploded ordnance (UXO) are increasing as the number of displaced people move through conflict areas. In 2021, 88 civilians, including 19 women and 19 children, were killed and another 196 people, including 33 women and 55 children, were injured from landmines and ERW.

SITUATION UPDATE



The Burmese army continues to bomb civilian villages almost every day, deliberately targeting civilians and Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps. Many homes and livelihoods have been burned down or destroyed, leaving thousands unable to go home. The number of IDPs continues to increase at alarming rates. As of February 28, the number of IDPs reached **519,500**, this is up from 451,000 people since WLB's December-January 2022 update.

Access constraints and **inadequate humanitarian aid** funding have prevented aid relief for millions of people across Burma/Myanmar. Cross-border assistance is the only way to reach people in need, and local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are doing most of the heavy lifting, by delivering food, water, shelters, health care, and sanitary packs for women. An increase in international humanitarian relief is critical, as food, clean water, and medical supplies are quickly running out. Women have been disproportionately affected by the impact the coup has had on the economy, which has left half of the population in **poverty**.

Across the country, frequent electricity power outages have **tripled the cost** of alternative fuel sources, such as candles, coal, and firewood. The cuts to electricity have significantly impacted the **supply of water**, forcing people to return to old ways of manually pumping water. In an attempt to curb dissent and pro-democracy organizing, the junta tripled the corporate tax rate for mobile and internet providers which has doubled the price of internet data. The disruption to essential services, coupled with rising levels of poverty, has disproportionately impacted women, as they struggle to provide for their families and face an increased risk of domestic violence.

WLB members report that women are not just experiencing an increase in domestic violence, but gender-based violence more broadly. On March 7, three men entered a clothing store in North Okkalarpa Township, Yangon, and **attacked a woman**, binding her hands and mouth, and holding a knife to her neck. On March 24 in Myitkyina, Kachin State capital, a woman selling small pieces of iron and bottles was **murdered** by a group of men when she refused to hand over her money.

Despite the Burmese army's efforts to terrorize civilians by stripping people of their homes, livelihoods, and safety, the resistance movement continues to grow. Eleven days after losing their homes and seeing their village burn down, women in Sagaing Region's Pale Township have bravely stood up to protest against the junta. Having lost everything, these women are fighting with a rare determination and bravery that is at the core of the women's resistance movement.

# “ YOU CAN BURN OUR VILLAGE, BUT NOT OUR SPIRIT AND OUR SOIL.

*chanted by women protesters in Sagaing Region*

To mark the one-year anniversary of the failed coup, a silent protest was held across the country. Streets emptied and shops were abandoned in many towns across Burma/Myanmar. Nearly **300 political prisoners** detained in Yangon's Insein Prison smeared their faces with thanaka, a cosmetic paste made from ground bark, and observed five minutes of silence.

The junta responded with violent attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD). In Monywa, Sagaing Region, the junta arrested at least four people, including a young protestor, and forced a pregnant WHRD to miscarry. Three teenage girls were **arrested and beaten** by junta security forces in Yangon for participating in the protest. A WLB member reported that homes of WHRD defenders in Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region, have been confiscated by the junta, forcing many to be housed in other aid workers' homes.

The junta continues to arrest anyone that speaks out against them. In Mandalay Region's Natogyi Township, Na Nwin Taw Bo Village on February 21, 20 people, including nine women, a **60-year-old amputee**, and a woman in her 60s, were **arrested**. On March 1, junta forces arrested Soe Su Myat Lwin (aka Bok Bok) at her home after the 22-year-old fashion designer from Indaw, Lawksawk Township in Shan State, allegedly criticized the junta on Facebook.

Those that are detained by the junta face torture and possible execution. The use of torture is institutionalized in the Burmese army, and has been a long-standing practice in successive military juntas in Burma/Myanmar. Since the attempted coup, the junta has tortured at least **103 pro-democracy supporters to death**.

March 8 marked **International Women's Day**; a day to recognize the social, cultural, and political achievements made by women. To celebrate the day, the US recognized Ei Thinzar Maung, National Unity Government (NUG)'s Deputy Minister for Women, Youth and Children Affairs, with the International Women of Courage Award for her human rights and pro-democracy activities. WLB would like to extend the acknowledgement of bravery and courage to all the women from Burma/Myanmar, who continue to stand tall in the face of violence, to demand an end to the impunity and cycle of patriarchal oppression.

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

The junta's systematic airstrikes and use of arson to destroy villages has forced over half a million people to flee from their homes. Ethnic people have been **disproportionally impacted**, and ethnic women face additional challenges as **gender gaps** remain in the humanitarian response.

**Humanitarian response efforts** have faced significant challenges, including restricted access by the junta, financial system breakdowns and cash shortages, and disruptions to supply chains. These challenges have created a humanitarian crisis where IDPs are in desperate need of food, healthcare, sanitary packs and blankets, and in some cases clean drinking water. **Omicron infection** has risen in many IDP camps and there is not enough accommodation for patients to quarantine. COVID-19 tests and medical supplies are expensive and difficult to obtain.

WLB members report that some IDP camps in Northern Shan State, Karenni/ Kayah State and Rakhine State are experiencing extreme water scarcity. In Karenni/ Kayah state, 50 percent of IDPs do not have **enough water** to drink. Inadequate access to water disproportionately harms women, as they lose their ability to maintain essential hygiene during monthly menses. WLB members report that IDPs in Karenni/ Kayah State only have enough food provisions for the next three months.

Women in IDP camps continue to experience additional challenges to men. Essential items needed to manage birth control and menses are either not being provided by humanitarian agencies, or are unable to reach IDP women. Pregnant women face considerable challenges and risks to their health as they are forced to birth in their village or IDP camps without proper medical care and facilities. The conflict and humanitarian crisis has placed women at a heightened risk of family and domestic violence, and sexual assault. WLB members report an increase in the number of women experiencing domestic violence, with previous supports and safe houses no longer available.

The socio-economic impact of the crisis has had a disproportionate impact on women, with over 580,000 women estimated to have lost their employment within the first six months of 2021. In Thayet Chaung Township, Tanintharyi Region, the junta cut off the supply of food, medicines, and telecommunication services. Local products such as betel nut, food, and supplies from local shops were confiscated by the junta, forcing civilians to buy food from businesses affiliated with the junta at inflated prices. Between February 2021 and February 2022, the prices of basic food items increased by nearly **30 percent across** Burma/ Myanmar. Price increases are largely due to increased fuel costs, deteriorating exchange rates, transport, import restrictions, and supply disruptions caused by junta roadblocks.

## CHIN STATE

The Burmese Army Light Infantry Brigade 222 continued to target Chin ethnic and religious minorities by **torching** the deserted town of Thantlang. The 10,000 residents had previously fled, having experienced **23 successive attacks** by the junta. The Burmese army burned over 900 buildings, including two non-government organization offices, eight churches, and 12 other religious buildings.

The junta increased its on-the-ground offensive, having sent an **additional 450 troops** to Kanpetlet Township since the end of January. The majority of residents have left their homes and are taking shelter in the forest. Six weeks of fighting between the junta and Chinland Defense Force in Sammathar Village and nearby areas has led to severe food shortages. About 900 people, including **pregnant women** and the elderly have fled into the forests and mountains.

It is estimated that more than 50,000 people are currently internally displaced across the nine Townships of Chin State, and approximately 40,000 have crossed the border as refugees in India's Mizoram State. The humanitarian crisis has prompted interest from overseas employment brokers, who are lobbying for job opportunities for young women displaced by the fighting. Employment broker schemes place young women at considerable risk of **exploitation and debt bondage**.

## KACHIN STATE

On February 3 the Burmese army launched an airstrike on Sumpi Yang Village in Putato Township, **injuring a 12-year-old girl** and a 50-year-old woman. Thousands of villagers have been forced to flee into the jungle, leaving behind their livelihoods and belongings as the junta launched another airstrike on the village. Among the villagers that were forced to flee, WLB members report that 10 of them were pregnant and in urgent need of shelter, food, and medical support. There are reportedly more than **5,000 people** living in the jungle, mainly older people, women, and children.

A few villagers managed to reach the Kachin capital, over 330km from Putao, however many IDPs fleeing the area were unable to pass junta **checkpoints**. The road connecting Putao and Myitkyina has been closed, causing disruptions to the delivery of food and essential items to Putao. The disruptions have **increased the cost of goods**, especially fuel. Almost all **telecommunication** services are severely restricted or failing to work, with only the Burmese army-backed telecommunication service currently accessible.

## KAREN STATE

The Burmese army conducted three airstrikes and heavy artillery strikes on March 27, on Armed Forces Day. A few days earlier, Burmese army airstrikes displaced over 10,000 villagers from Dooplaya/ Kawkareik District. In early 2022, **20,000 villagers** from the southern Myawaddy areas and from the southern Kawkareik areas were forced to flee their homes. In Hpapun/ Mutraw District alone, 82,220

people have been displaced. Karen community based groups estimate that as many as **144,000 people** in seven KNU controlled districts are now displaced.

**Seven Karen villagers** were killed and four injured when the Burmese army fired heavy artillery at Klaw Day Village on March 5. Three were young girls aged 2, 5 and 14 and two were women, one of whom was pregnant. Their deaths were not accidental. The villagers were targeted in their homes using long-range heavy artillery by soldiers based in Hpa-pun

Rising cost of petrol and extreme weather has caused problems for Lawy Pha Htaw residents to extract water from underground wells. As many as 350 households in the village are without cooking and **drinking water**.

The fighting has caused significant difficulties for farmers who have lost crops because of the fighting, or are unable to transport their produce to the Thai market because landmines and junta forces make the road unsafe to travel. A woman from **Ka Maing Kone Village** was recently shot by indiscriminate shelling by the Burmese army as she returned to the village.

## **KARENNI/KAYAH STATE**

On January 28, the junta murdered six people, including women and children, and dumped their bodies in a sewage pit in Loikaw's Yay-yo Village. A **63-year-old woman** named Daw Muta and her son, were discovered in Loikaw's Htudu-Ngantha Village a week earlier. The bodies of all the victims displayed signs of torture.

Over 1,000 junta soldiers entered Heigh Kwee Dam and War Yi Phu Pha Lai Village near Moebye on February 16. Daily airstrikes in and around Moebye have forced thousands to flee. More than **170,000 people** have been displaced in Karenni/ Kayah State since the attempted coup. 120,000 IDPs remain in the region, taking shelter in monasteries and in the forest.

Cases of the Omicron **COVID-19 variant has spread rapidly** through the displacement camps, with almost 50 percent of people in Demoso's displacement camp having had contracted the virus in recent weeks. Many roads have been made impassable since the fighting broke out in Moebye, making it near impossible to get test kits and essential medical provisions to the IDP camps.

## **SAGAING REGION**

During February, 2,882 houses were burned down in arson attacks by the junta in Sagaing Region. A unit of 300 junta soldiers **burned down houses** in three villages near Sagaing Region's border with Chin State. During an imposed **internet blackout** by the junta on 23 townships in Sagaing Region, 80 junta troops stormed Khin-U Township and incinerated the entire village. On March 16, the junta burned down approximately **30 buildings** in two villages in Yinmabin Township.



In an attack on a village in Taze Township on March 12, the junta shot and killed a teenage girl named Thae Oo Phyu. A 70-year old woman **burned to death** after her home was set on fire; unable to run she became trapped inside her house when the junta torched her home.

On February 23, Theresa Nu Len, aged 40, hid with her two teenage daughters, aged 16 and 14, in **a field of sunflowers** when junta soldiers came to their village of Than Po. The junta shot them and burned their bodies in the farmhouse.

The day after the silent strike, Yi Yi Khine died from a bullet wound to her stomach. Yi Yi Khine was a teacher and **a brave member** of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM); she was also a mother. The bullet hit her while she rode her motorcycle with her child on her back.

WLB member reported the shooting of a 42-year-old woman, Nu Tem Boih in Kalay. She was shot dead on the way to visit her mother. A 50-year-old man, U Aung Lwin Oo died during interrogation and Ma Thiri was shot to death by an unidentified gunman while she was selling Mohinga in Tharsi Village.

A total of 400 people have been **arrested** since the military coup in Kalay, according to the leaders of the Kalay City Strike Committee. WLB member reported the arrest of 3 women during the month of February. On the evening of February 15, three people, including a CDM teacher, were arrested in Kalay.

## **SHAN STATE**

Residents in Southern Shan State have reported an increase in the number of **landmine-related** deaths and injuries since the middle of last year. The junta laid many landmines around **China's Shwe gas and oil pipeline** in December 2021. The land was previously used by local villagers to grow rice and vegetables, collect firewood and allow their animals to graze. Now, no one goes there because it is too dangerous.

Junta forces resumed its offensive in northern Shan State's **Kokang region** in early March, with over 100 junta soldiers attacking the base to the west of the Man Pin hills in Mongko's Mone Paw District. Between attacks by the junta and ethnic armed groups, women in Shan State are experiencing great risk to their security, health and wellbeing. The bodies of Ta'ang politician, Mai Noam Han, his wife and **seven-month old daughter** were found on March 9 in a remote part of the forest.

The conflict has increased women's experience of gender-based violence. WLB member reported 12 incidences of gender-based violence in the Shan State in the month of February. A Shan teenage girl attempted suicide after she was **raped** by Ta'ang ethnic armed group. The armed group paid \$600 in compensation to the young woman and the soldier was sentenced to only three years of imprisonment.

# WLB AND MEMBERS' SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

Since the coup, WLB has supported the CDM, including WHRDs, government officials, and young people involved in the Spring Revolution. WLB's support includes financial assistance for travel, accommodation, communication costs and food for both women and men who face threats to their security. WLB actively supports IDPs displaced by the civil war, by providing basic food, medicine and shelter.

## SINCE THE COUP, WLB HAS SUPPORTED:

<b>2,363</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>685</b>	<b>5,920</b>
people from the CDM	women human rights defenders and activities	human rights defenders and activities	Internally Displaced Persons

WLB continues to advocate on behalf of all women in Burma/ Myanmar, by raising awareness internationally of the systemic gender based violence and discrimination experienced by women at the hands of the Burmese army. During the months of February and March, WLB:

- Actively participated and provided inputs in National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) meetings, including Joint Coordination Committee strategy meetings, representing the voices of women.
- Met with the US Ambassador from Yangon and the UK Embassy to raise awareness of the junta's long history of impunity, especially in regards to gender-based violence.
- Met with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General On Sexual Violence in Conflict to provide an update on the current situation for women in Burma/Myanmar;
- Spoke at the Asia, Justice and Rights (AJAR) panel for the International Day for the Right of the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights violations and for the Dignity of Victims;
- Met with the Alliance for Sanctions on Military's Survival to discuss international targeted sanctions in Burma/ Myanmar;
- Hosted a panel discussion and ran a t-shirt campaign for International Women's Day;
- Coordinated feminist training for the future of inclusive federalism and spoke on the Federal Journal Political Talk Show on the importance of women leadership and gender equality in the path towards federalism;
- Raised awareness of the culture of impunity inherent in the Burmese army and broader societal structures at an event held by Synergy.



# CONCLUSION

During the month of February and March, atrocities committed by the Burmese army has continued. The atrocities are occurring as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the population, and include grave forms of sexual violence, murder, enslavement, torture, and extermination, amounting to war crimes and **crimes against humanity**.

Following the US determination that the Burmese army **committed genocide against Rohingya people**, we employ the US to take urgent action by recommending the UN Security Council adopt a resolution referring the situation in Burma/ Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

As the peoples' movement continues, the Burmese army is no longer able to rely on its ground infantry. The Burmese army has responded by strengthening its airstrike offensive; bombing villages almost on a daily basis. WLB calls on the UN Security Council and the international community to support the global enforcement of sanctions against the junta, specifically imposing sanctions against the supply of aviation fuel and arms to Burma/ Myanmar. The companies involved in supplying **aviation fuel** to the Burmese army are complicit in the bombing of civilians and serious violations of international law.

The humanitarian crisis requires a swift response from the international community to increase humanitarian aid funding for CSOs in border communities. Women have been providing assistance to conflict-affected populations in ethnic regions for decades. Their experience is invaluable and they require diplomatic and funding support from the international community to carry out cross-border humanitarian efforts.

The response to IDPs seeking refugee status from Burma/ Myanmar's neighbors has been woefully inadequate. Neighboring countries have non-refoulement obligations under customary international law. This requires Burma/ Myanmar's neighbors, such as Thailand, to allow refugees to seek safe refuge, and not be forced to return to Burma/ Myanmar where they are at risk of persecution. With the support of the international community, we call on neighboring countries to accept an increase in refugees from Burma/ Myanmar, and to provide them with safe and adequate shelter, food, and medical care.

## 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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