

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland

*“We Dare
Not Return”*

Displacement and the
Denial of Human Rights
in Southeastern Burma



March 2023

Introduction

On 7 February 2021, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) began documenting the escalation of atrocities committed by the military junta following a failed coup attempt on 1 February 2021. Over the last two years, the expansion of Burma Army soldiers, particularly in ethnic areas, has caused widespread displacement. Innocent civilians have been injured, killed and routinely forced to flee their villages as soldiers target them. The systematic and widespread assaults perpetrated by the junta-backed forces are ongoing.

HURFOM has observed no signs of the military easing its attacks. State-backed armed forces have instead continued to spearhead their campaign of terror, including the perpetration of illegal, inhumane acts. Among the many human rights violations we have documented are arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate firing and shelling, enforced disappearances, murder and torture. A lack of reliable domestic accountability measures has allowed the Burma Army to evade responsibility for their crimes. No one in Burma feels safe under the current circumstances. This is due to the significant curtailing of fundamental human rights, democratic norms and freedoms.

Deeply ingrained military impunity has shielded the junta soldiers from accountability as they burn homes, raid villages, and violently detain innocent people. A flawed military-drafted Constitution protects the Burma Army as the highest authority, paying no mind nor interest in their vast crimes, which have spanned decades. To the Generals, they are the exception to every rule, including the ones that they dictate and which technically make their coup a violation of their own accord.

In Southeastern Burma, HURFOM reports on the human rights situation in Mon State, Karen State and the Tanintharyi region. The junta has advanced troops in all three locations, and residents have struggled to cope amid the worsening hardships. Martial law has also been declared across these areas, forcing residents to increase their security by digging bunkers and foxholes to defend themselves from ongoing artillery shelling and attacks.

Our documentation of rights violations, which includes testimonies from victims, is evidence that the attacks by the junta are targeted. In the last two years, calls from civil society organizations have urged the international community to respond to their plight. However, a failure to hold the junta accountable encourages the armed forces to commit acts that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

More than anything, the Burma Army craves legitimacy and has used violence as a tool to try and forcibly submit the people to their will. However, despite the grave horrors projected onto civilians, the efforts and momentum behind the Spring Revolution remains steady. It is a struggle that many feel they cannot abandon until their rights are fully restored. Resistance in Burma has taken on many forms, though one thing remains clear - the steadfast determination and will that the people share in their hopes for a democratic future.

In our latest report, ***“We Dare Not Return:” Displacement and the Denial of Human Rights in Southeastern Burma***, HURFOM analyzes the current situation in our respective target areas of Southeastern Burma throughout the year 2022. Our findings draw on interviews with emergency response teams, survivors, and witnesses of the Burma Army’s attacks.

HURFOM fieldworkers took much-needed steps to ensure the cases referenced in this report were collected safely and with the full consent of the communities they spoke with.

Fieldworkers Note

HURFOM has fieldworkers in Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi Region, and human rights networks across the country. Three reporters are working from Mon and Karen State in areas controlled by ethnic armed organizations. Within this team, HURFOM will continue to monitor the human rights situation in our target areas as closely as possible. Given the new limitations that civil society organizations now face in the post-coup environment, we have found that the human rights situation is an even more significant concern.

Our field workers continue to document human rights violations as best as they can, given the extreme risks they face daily. The growing threats to their safety only speak to the society of fear the junta has created. HURFOM’s documentation and data are sourced from our network of field staff reporting on the ground. The restrictions imposed by the junta have made it much more difficult to access all of our target areas freely and without repercussions. HURFOM field staff are facing severe risks to their physical and digital security. Secure methods of communication have been adopted, such as encrypted technology. However, there are still many challenges to ensure that the Burma Army does not infiltrate the work and documentation of HURFOM.

The Burma Army is known for intimidating and harassing fieldworkers documenting human rights violations. Soldiers often threaten survivors who share their stories with rights groups as well. At the moment, HURFOM is safely able to work in ceasefire areas and armed controlled territories of the Karen National Union and the New Mon State Party. Recording events and testimonies are extremely high-risk outside of these areas.

The movement restrictions enforced by the military limit the documentation possible. The information outlined in this short briefing paper includes HURFOM data from the ground. Many of our estimates are likely significantly higher, given the challenges we face collecting these data. Our team is immensely grateful to those who shared their fears and hopes for the future with HURFOM.

Main Findings

Between 1 January and 31 December 2022, HURFOM collected the following human rights violations in Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi Region:

Total Findings in 2022 in Southeastern Burma

146+

Killed

**Including at least 26
women and children**

1,155+

Arrested and Detained

85+

Enforced Disappearances

52+

**Opposition Members
Targeted**

480+

Injured

**Including at least 120
women and children**

685+

Cases of Extortion and Ransoms

750+

Houses Burned

Including at least 58 villages

150,450+

Internally Displaced People across target areas

Total Findings in 2022 in Mon State



27+
Killed



70+
Injured



280+
Arrested
and Detained



383+
Cases of
Extortion and
Ransoms



16+
Enforced
Disappearances



115+
Homes and
Villages Burned



21+
Opposition
Members
Targeted



28,000+
Forcibly
Displaced

Total Findings in 2022 in Karen State



35+
Killed



200+
Injured



187+
Arrested
and Detained



80+
Cases of
Extortion and
Ransoms



12+
Enforced
Disappearances



300+
Homes and
Villages Burned



10+
Opposition
Members
Targeted



70,180
Forcibly
Displaced

Total Findings in 2022 in the Tanintharyi Region



86+
Killed



210+
Injured



695+
Arrested
and Detained



225+
Cases of
Extortion and
Ransoms



57+
Enforced
Disappearances



355+
Homes and
Villages Burned



20+
Opposition
Members
Targeted



52, 270+
Forcibly
Displaced

Executive Summary

“No one dares to return to the village. We started to flee after the first artillery attack hit us. We didn’t know where it was coming from. Many villagers have died,” a Karen Ethnic religious leader said while describing fleeing the junta’s attacks in Taung Zun village, Kyainsekyi Township, Karen State.

The violence in Burma since the military coup in February 2021 has set the country back decades. Above all, the junta craves control and autonomy of the land and people across the many states and regions. Soldiers do not regard the rule of law or intend to end their war on the country’s people. Before the coup, the democratically elected party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, was set to be sworn on. The NLD made history with its first victory in 2015, which saw the country’s first non-military president in five decades and won in another landslide in the national 2020 elections in November. Now, party leaders have been killed, detained or forced into exile by the junta. Head of State, Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint face ludicrous charges, which could see them imprisoned for the rest of their lives.

Life in Burma has become challenging. The junta has undermined civilian security by deploying violence against anyone challenging the military’s rule. Since the coup, there has been a steady increase in human rights violations. People feel very unsafe and have been trying to flee their areas. A growing sense of fear and a survival mentality has overwhelmed the population. The food crisis has left hundreds hungry and isolated. Local communities and service providers have attempted to fill gaps. Still, it is difficult as grassroots organizations are already incredibly strained with their efforts extending to various causes.

Significant hurdles still exist in ensuring humanitarian aid’s safe and secure provision delivery. The Burma Army has blocked key routes and intersections. Civilians passing through are regularly interrogated and extorted for their funds and possessions. During the second week of May 2022, HURFOM recorded over 35 cases of motorcycles confiscated in southern Mon State and northern Dawei. More than 50 vehicles and truck owners were stopped, arrested without reason, and forced to pay between 80,000 and 200,000 Myanmar kyats (43 USD and 108 USD) in Mon and Karen States as a ransom to be released.

Bribery, extortion and torture are common tactics the junta uses to exert control and fear. The rate of arbitrary arrests, unlawful detainment and abductions has made communities across Southeastern Burma fear they might be the next victim.

Civilians have been forced to leave their homes and are widely displaced across the country. The presence of Burma Army soldiers in their villages has made prospects for return unlikely. Landmines have also been deliberately placed outside of their farms and towns. They dare not return.

In addition, the regime has continue to show a blatant disregard for the property of local people. Land grabs were reported in Mon State, despite fierce opposition from civilians. Between 20 and 24 May 2022, the junta-run Land Record Department and the General Administration Department installed approximately 18 landmarks without prior informed consent from the landowners in Kyaik Roi and Pai-Kamar village, located in the proposed junta's airport project in Mudon, Mon State.

Another concern has been the establishment of a new pro-military militia that has formed in many townships in HURFOM-targeted areas. The soldiers target activists, journalists, social workers, and members of political parties such as the NLD in gruesome murders. On 2 May 2022, two pro-military men on a motorcycle came to the home of NLD representative Daw Shan Ma, aged 50. She was shot, and then the culprits fled. Two NLD members and supporters were killed in Long Lone Township, Dawei the week prior. Many believed that the junta-backed militia members committed these murders. The group publicly declared they also had plans to target press members and their families. Amid all the uncertainty and lack of a clear path forward, most people in HURFOM target areas are unhappy and fearful.

Military impunity remains deeply ingrained in the institutions representing the Tatmadaw, which only encourages the junta to continue perpetrating human rights violations. The international community, including United Nations bodies and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), are not responding swiftly enough to the situation in Burma, which demands urgent attention and consequences for the junta.

A Mon social worker who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons also expressed concern at the lack of United Nations presence or action. They noted the disappointing lack of international intervention across Burma by stating: ***“They should know that the Burma military is the root cause of the current crisis.”***

The following sections detail the situation in each of HURFOM's target areas in 2022. Throughout the first year of the failed coup, HURFOM recorded at least 2,383 civilians arrested and detained, 346 injured, and 72 killed in Southeast Burma. Only six months

into the year, in June 2022, HURFOM reported that 40 civilians were arrested, 45 were detained, 25 were injured, and 16 were murdered. More than twice as many people were killed in June 2022 compared to the month before, in May.

The second half of the year continued was met with more destruction caused by the Burma Army. By the end of December 2022, HURFOM reported that this number had almost doubled, increasing to 3,361 arrested and detained, 672 injuries, and 198 deaths. These numbers continue to grow exponentially. The circumstances have set a worrying tone for what is to come in the junta's ongoing illegal, unjustified and profoundly violent pursuit for legitimacy.

The report will also describe in detail the lengths to which the Burma Army is willing to defy democratic norms and principles to assert control. In contrast, the people's overwhelming rejection of the military has maintained the spirit and momentum of the Spring Revolution.

Key Observations

1

Inflation across all target areas has significantly increased the prices of rice, cooking oil, chili and other essential daily food items. The economic destabilization has been worsened by a lack of employment opportunities. A daily worker earning 5000 Myanmar Kyat (approximately 2 USD) a day can now not feed a family of more than three. The income and outcome are imbalanced. People have to struggle just to buy food.

2

The military junta increased surveillance and security of civilians and new problematic draft cyber law which could see people imprisoned for having a Virtual Private Network. The regime has blocked several websites, including popular social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook, to try and stop the organizing of anti-coup activities.

3

Forced recruitment has become a concerning issue across the region. The military battalion conducting the forced recruitment is known as 'Maw-Ra-Waddy-Naval Command'. It operates under the management of the Coastal Regiment Command in Ohn-Pin-Kwin, Yebyu, and Dawei.

4

Family members continue to confirm that their loved ones have disappeared after being abducted and detained by the military junta, including senior officials affiliated with the National League for Democracy. Their locations remain largely unknown.

5

A noticeable trend of worsening violence against women has only increased security concerns. HURFOM reported on the case of a pregnant woman who soldiers beat. In a separate case, a pregnant woman was raped while soldiers interrogated her husband. There are ongoing cases of police brutality where women are subjected to physical, sexual and verbal abuse in military custody.

6

Ongoing clashes have led to forced internal displacement in Burma as instability and tensions move people from their homes. Neighbouring countries, notably Thailand, have pushed refugees back into conflict zones on more than one occasion. They have refused to grant asylum or permit the free and safe transfer of humanitarian aid to displaced, vulnerable communities.

7

Police and junta-backed militias continue to initiate door-to-door checks and arrest those on their wanted lists. People are abducted, and ransoms are demanded in exchange for their return. The amounts are very high. If families cannot pay, those detained are violently interrogated in military-run jails.

8

Motorcycles, mobile devices, and money are confiscated and extorted from civilians at checkpoints stationed by the junta deliberately along critical routes. Civilians must pay excessive bribes to retrieve their possessions. However, very few were able to afford the high costs.

9

Torture remains rampant in Burma and across target areas where innocent civilians are subjected to grueling, horrifying acts by the junta to extract information.

10

Children are targeted by the military junta and deprived of basic needs, including medical attention, food, education, and the right to live safely. As the regime routinely bombs civilian areas, schools are among the targets. Young children have been traumatized by these experiences, which include fleeing to the forests or hiding in bunkers.

11

The arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention by the junta are ongoing, as are warrant-less raids and indiscriminate firing into civilian areas such as churches, monasteries and schools.

12

Human rights defenders face constant threats to their safety and livelihoods for their outspoken criticism of the junta and for organizing pro-democracy activities. This includes teachers and medics. In May 2022, HURFOM reported that 52 medical workers were fired, and six activists were sentenced to prison sentences of at least two years. In June 2022, 20 health workers were also fired for their pro-democracy activities in Mon State and the Tanintharyi region.

13

The junta sponsors armed and violent groups like the Pyu Saw Htee and Black Kite Brotherhood. They have targeted innocent civilians, predominantly those affiliated with the pro-democracy movement. Their crimes are violent and occur regularly. In addition, the rise of plain-clothes 'security' officers is backed by the military junta, which has used intimidation tactics and threats to extort civilians for money and possessions. On 3 August 2022, HURFOM released a briefing paper documenting at least 129 victims of militia violence, with 18 killed across target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region since 1 February 2021.

14

Alongside the junta's instability which they are responsible for, a widespread failure with the rule of law coupled with a dysfunctional education system is thought to have contributed to 40% of youth in Ye Township, Mon State and Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division succumbing to drug abuse.

15

The junta strictly enforced martial law, particularly in Mon State. It has seriously impacted civilians' mobility amid increasing surveillance. Act #144, commonly known as martial law, bans local people from going outside at night. The impact of this curfew has prevented many from going to their workplaces and participating in social activities.

16

Students, including young children, continue to have education prospects threatened and undermined by the military's presence in Burma. Parents are apprehensive about their children's uncertainties at school, given the presence of the military junta. As a result, some University students in Mon State who have already passed their matriculation exam have chosen to put their studies on hold due to unsettled political agreements and security concerns.

17

The increased use of landmines, particularly, in Martial Law imposed areas, including southern Mon state, has led to growing safety concerns for local people who fear going to work on their farms and rubber plantations. Consequently, they have begun to abandon their livelihoods.

The human rights violations observed by HURFOM over the last year will continue throughout 2023 and beyond if the military is not held accountable. While various forms of resistance are active on the ground, the junta will take more international responses to be dismantled. The recommendations are listed at the end of this report.

Alongside increasing surveillance, HURFOM has documented that local people in southeastern Burma live in constant fear, with no protection, security, or the rule of law. The soldiers responsible for these ongoing crimes have not been held accountable or faced repercussions for their mass injustices.

The Human Rights Situation in 2022 in Southeastern Burma

The following sections of this report will detail the deteriorating human rights situation in Karen State, Mon State and the Tanintharyi region throughout 2022. While the violations are categorized separately, in many cases, the military junta committed more than one crime at a time.

Karen State

At the beginning of January 2022, HURFOM had documented at least 20,000 newly displaced people in Karen State due to clashes between the Burma Army and junta security forces. For decades, the Karen have been fighting for autonomy and the right to their land, language and traditions. Their fight for freedom has been filled with sacrifice and immense bravery by human rights defenders and armed opposition leaders.

Since 1 February 2021, the hostilities against the Karen people have intensified as the Burma Army expands its presence in local areas. HURFOM has spoken to dozens of villagers who report being fearful of their futures and the uncertainty for survival.

The following are cases of human rights violations reported by the HURFOM fieldworkers. None of the victims or their families have received any type of reparations.



Airstrikes & Artillery Fighting

Airstrikes in Karen State, deployed by the military junta, continue to undermine civilian safety as residential areas are targeted. On 10 April 2022, more violence by the junta wreaked havoc in Lay Kay Kaw when members of the Myanmar military launched airstrikes along the Thai-Burma border. Rather than adhere to orders by the KNU to retreat, the Army continues to send in more reinforcements. The junta allegedly used reports of chemical warfare during the most recent outbreak of clashes. The military junta is deliberately targeting innocent people. In Kawkareik township alone, 12,177 people were forcibly displaced by the end of March 2022 due to the military junta's ongoing offensives.

In June 2022, another airstrike was launched by the Burma Army. At the end of the month, the regime targeted villagers in Dooplaya District. Medics who spoke to HURFOM said that these brutal attacks led to more than 500 locals fleeing their homes and livelihoods.

HURFOM has documented the growing numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Karen State as the junta increases their presence, despite multiple orders from the Karen National Union (KNU) for the military to retreat and withdraw all their forces immediately. The junta forces in southeastern Dooplaya have been deploying relentless attacks against local villages with heavy mortar shelling and airstrikes. At least seven airstrikes targeted 16 villages located in Dooplaya District.

Instability across the area has resulted from the Burma Army's expanding presence. Junta forces Infantry Battalion No.97 indiscriminately fired artillery missiles in at least three villages on August 15th. They killed one person and injured seven in Kawkareik township. These indiscriminate shots led to the death of a two-year-old child and an elder, U Tin Maung, age 77, was seriously wounded in his back. In July, the junta destroyed 35 houses and four cow stables in Thayar Gone village from indiscriminate firing. Local villagers who fled due to the artillery attacks said that another five residential homes in Maung Ma Yew Village were also ruined.

On 6 October 2022, at least three villages located 4 miles north of Three Pagodas Town near the Thai-Burma border were fired at. Villagers from Mae-Ka-Thar village, Three Pagodas Pass and Kyainnseiky, who were forced to escape, verified that due to air strikes, at least eight villagers' houses and a Buddhist monastery were destroyed during the brutal attacks. Before the attack, fighting had broken out between the joint troops of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade 6 and PDFs. Due

to the attack, approximately 500 children, women and the elderly were forced to abandon their villages. Heavy rains and floods have made it more difficult for villagers to escape. As HURFOM and other civil society organizations have routinely called for, aviation fuel must be sanctioned and a global arms embargo imposed.

On October 23, 2022, close to midnight, junta forces relaunched a series of air attacks and artillery shells targeting Hlaing Kwei village, located in Yay-Pu-Gyi village tract, Kawkareik Township, Karen State. This caused more than 200 villagers from eight villages to flee. A 40-year-old villager who spoke to reporters told HURFOM: “Two artillery attacks came first and exploded near the town. Then the villagers started to run. Some managed to escape to the village’s Buddhist Monastery. Later, several KNLA soldiers arrived and told the villagers not to take refuge in the monastery because the Burma Army would target them. Due to the attacks by the junta, locals from Wizzar-gone village, Hlaing Kwei, Win village, Win Pote, Hpan-Khar-Gone and Kyun-Taw villagers, Kawkareik approximately 300 fled the attacks overnight.

In November, in retaliation for attacks on junta bases, the Burma Army resorted to targeting civilian areas in Karen State in response to attacks on junta bases. Their air forces attacked Bilin civilians with fighter jets. According to an emergency response member, several houses were burnt down, and a villager was injured. The Karen National Union (KNU)-Bilin Township Brigade committee members also confirmed that some residential homes were destroyed by the air strikes on November 7, 2022, at 12:30 PM in Baw Naw Wah Village, Bilin Township, KNU-Thaton District. The incident occurred around midnight when people were resting. One of the victims, Saw Kyaw Lay, age 27, was injured by mortar shells.

Nearly one week later, on November 16, 2022, at 1:40 AM, a junta fighter jet attacked with missiles targeting Tha Byu Lead Mining, located 18 miles from the border town of Three Pagodas, southern Kyainnseiky, Karen State. The entire mine camp exploded, killing three civilians and injuring eight people. Patients were taken to Three Pagodas Public Hospital.

A teacher who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement said to HURFOM:

“We were safe because we did not stay at the plantation. After the armed conflicts intensified in the KNU Brigade 6 area, the junta continued carrying out airstrikes. The military council army’s camps and police stations were attacked and occupied by the Karen National Liberation Army and the People’s Defense Forces.”

HURFOM fieldworkers have spoken with communities at length about the challenges they face and the fears they carry regularly. No one is safe. The beginning of December 2022 began with two military fighter jets attacking Lead Mine No. 6 located

in Mae-Ka-Tha village, Three Pagodas Pass, 17 miles from the border of the Thai-Burma Border Line. Residents who talked to HURFOM reporters said the shelling may have killed at least four civilians. The month prior, on November 6 and 16th, the junta's fighter jets attacked this area, and the entire mine camp exploded, killing three civilians and injuring eleven. Villagers reported that within a week, at least fourteen local residences were destroyed. A 26-year-old male villager was injured due to the artillery fired by the junta troops in the villages of Kawkareik township.

On December 3, 2022, a series of artillery shells were fired by the Kawkareik-based junta Infantry Battalion into a Karen village called, Baw-Dai village, damaging a house and causing 26-year-old villager Maung Aye Zaw to suffer a head injury: "I have received reports of damages to local farm animals and other livestock harmed by the heavy weapons in Taung-Kyar-Inn and Kyun-Taung villages, located in southern Kawkareik Township," a village committee from Kyun Taung village told reporters. Some agricultural tools and equipment were confirmed damaged as well. Due to these attacks by the Burmese Army, about 300 villagers fled, according to the KNU Brigade 6 administrative.

On December 7, 2022, artillery shells again fired by the junta battalion based in Kawkareik exploded in Mounhma Village's New Monastic Education School, injuring one teacher and one student. The next day, the KNU Education and Culture Department confirmed that a 30-year-old teacher at Mounhma School was struck in the face and hand by an artillery shells. An 8-year-old student was also seriously injured. Residents said that the school building was almost completely destroyed. The attacks forced another 200 civilians to flee to safer places.

By December 16 2022, new armed clashes between the military council's LIB No. 231 and KNLA joint forces in southern Kawkareik Township had continued fiercely. At least three people were injured, and hundreds of residents fled their homes. On 18 December in the morning in Yankot village and Koh Nweh villages south of Kawkareik, the junta indiscriminately fired with artillery and bombarded fourteen homes. At noon the same day, the junta fired another round of artillery weapons toward Phakya, Kawkareik Township, eradicating four more homes and injuring two male villagers.

In another case, on 19 December 2022, a 9-year-old boy and a 97-year-old man from the village of Kohnweh were injured by weapons fired by the Junta troops LIB 231 during the fighting in Koh-Nweh, Kawkareik Township. "So far, the KNU Brigade is aiding in medically treating these injured. But, medicine and equipment for emergency responses are still scarce, as is food. The situation is very worrying."



Destruction of Property

The military junta has adopted its scorched earth campaign tactics in Karen State, where villagers cannot return home because their homes are deliberately set on fire. In the Karen National Union (KNU) administrative area of Thaton Township, Lim Bo Lai village residents saw 61 of their houses burnt to ashes, as well as a monastery and a school. Three villagers were also killed. The bodies of the three villagers were found in the ashes of burned houses. Those killed by the military were Saw Samu, age 39, Saw Maung Lupyo, age 55 and Htee Doh Pawee, age 54, a Buddhist monk. The perpetrators of this brutal attack were the junta's Light Infantry Division No. 44. "In this situation, even if we can return home, there are often no houses left to live in," said a villager.



Photo: Evidence of properties, including religious buildings, destroyed by the junta.

Credit: Doo Tha Htu District, KNU



Indiscriminate Firing

On 9 January 2022, at least one person died, and the junta's indiscriminate firing seriously injured four others in Sakawet and Kado Hta villages in Kawkareik township. These attacks displaced 700 people. The next day, junta fighter jets and helicopters launched airstrikes on Ywa-Thit village in Kawkareik township. By the 14th, villagers had found landmines planted deliberately by the Burma Army surrounding the areas they had attacked in the days prior.

Then, on 17 January 2022 at 3 AM, two civilians were injured when they were struck by bullets fired by the junta in Kawkareik township. According to relief and health service providers, an estimated 27 villages in Southern Kawkareik were evacuated due to the ongoing military and offensives. At this point, over 20,000 people had been displaced. Nonetheless, in the days that followed, the junta raided the abandoned villages. It even occupied the campus of the Basic Education High School No 1. and 3 in Hpa-An township, Karen State.

On 4 April 2022, residents in Kawkareik township, civilians in Karen State, awoke to heavy artillery fire by the junta's 97th Infantry Battalion. A 17-year-old girl was struck by the shells and was killed on the way to the hospital. Four others were seriously injured. The Karen National Liberation Army, an armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU), confirmed that the junta's fighter jets had attacked Kyeik and Paikaldon village tracts, an area held by Brigade six forces. The fighting continued through the first week of the month, forcing roughly 600 villagers to flee in at least four airstrikes over the last month.

Just days before, in Taung Kya Inn village, Kawkareik township, the junta shelled a residential area, damaging houses and a temple on 31 March. Luckily, no one was injured, though survivors looked upon their demolished homes and, overcome with sadness, began to break down in tears.



1 JANUARY

Six youth abducted in Hpa-An, Karen State.



9 JANUARY

At least 1 died and 4 four were seriously injured by the junta's indiscriminate firing in Sakawet and Kado Hta villages, Kawkareik Township. There were 700 people displaced.



10 JANUARY

Junta army fighter jets and helicopters launched airstrikes on a village called Ywa-Thit, in Kawkareik Township.

14 JANUARY

Landmines planted by the junta battalions were found in some Mae Htaw Thale villages in Kawkareik Township.

17 JANUARY

At 3AM, two civilians were injured by indiscriminate firing by the junta in Kawkareik Township.

20 JANUARY

The military council arrested and detained five youths in Hpa-An, Karen State. Two were beaten, and one was hospitalized.

25 JANUARY

According to relief and health service providers on the ground, an estimated 27 villages in southern Kawkareik were evacuated due to military offensives and airstrikes leading to over 20,000 IDPs.

26 JANUARY

Junta military forces raided and eradicated a village called An-Pha-Gyi village in the southern part of Kawkareik Township, Karen State.

28 JANUARY

The junta forces build bunkers on and surrounding the campus of the Basic Education High School No. 1 and 3 in Hpa-An, Karen State.



Forced Portering

Alongside the armed conflict, villagers in Karen State have been forced to porter for the junta. Those who refuse are being punished. On 3 December, Column No. 1 of Light Infantry Battalion No. 432 ordered every village to provide ten male villagers to carry army supplies. The porters were required to bring food, ammunition, and other materials from their homes, according to the sources from the Kama MOUNG village, Kyiannseiki Township, Karen State.



Murder

Across HURFOM target areas, civilians have expressed a lack of assurance in the promises of the junta-backed village administrators. They have extorted money from workers who wanted to have one of these permit-to-work cards. In addition, interactions with the junta troops at night can be deadly. On September 23 2022, a villager from Ka Log village, Southern Ye Township, Mon State, was shot and killed by the military security forces. Soldiers said he breached martial law. “My rubber plantation is in Thanbyuzayat, and we live in Mudon Township’s Administrative zones. They granted the “ID card,” but the junta soldiers always stop us at the checkpoint on the way to work,” said another rubber plantation worker in Kwan Hlar village.



Theft, Extortion & Warrantless Raids

Civilians are regularly extorted for their possessions, including mobile phones, vehicles, and money. Ambush patrols of Burma Army soldiers have been deployed along the roads in and around Hpa-an and are said to carry out extortions of local civilians and travellers. A woman who spoke to HURFOM said her son was fined 50,000 Myanmar Kyats (27 USD) for not having a license. However, he still had to pay once he proved he had one. “These kinds of things happen every day,” she added.

Further, ambush patrols of Burma Army soldiers have been deployed along the roads in and around Hpa-an. They were reported to be carrying out extortions of local civilians and travellers.



Torture

Civilians who have been unjustly imprisoned are also unsafe in the jails run by the junta. The guards and other prisoners target political prisoners. After two political prisoners escaped in June 2022, violent tactics were deployed against prisoners in Hpa-An, Karen State. Nearly 73 inmates were confirmed injured in riots involving prison authorities between June 3-5, 2022. Young inmates were struck with electric sticks and shot at with iron nuts attached to slingshots from outside the cells, according to a source who asked to remain anonymous: “The prison authorities used the senior criminals to do their dirty work in the prisons, rather than themselves. On the nights of June 3 and 4, when the inmates were napping, the Warden ordered several prisoners to stab the young political prisoners from outside the cells. It was covered in blood, and many inmates were injured.” The inmates were also deprived of food and water for days. At least four dozen inmates suffered injuries.

By the end of 2022, the human rights situation still had not shown any signs of improvement in Karen State. In reality, the crises worsened in the last weeks of December 2022, with thousands more civilians continuing to flee throughout January 2023.

Mon State

An extension of the junta’s flawed bureaucracy includes fear by civil society organizations of ongoing crackdowns by the military junta, who are looking to see if they have a valid registration in Mon State. The military approved a new organizational registration law on October 28, 2022. The law states that organizations operating without an official registration will face a three-year imprisonment sentence and a one million Myanmar Kyat fine (approximately 477 USD).

In December 2022, villagers also told HURFOM that the junta is threatening them not to share news related to armed clashes, bomb explosions or any information related to the revolution against the military via their social media accounts. Those who do share reports of such incidents will be arrested. The junta has also banned taking photos of armed clashes and bomb explosions and sharing such incidents on social media. The junta ban interferes with the flow of information.

“Even if it happened in our village, we dare not take a photo. We dare not share the news,” said a villager. However, villagers are unaware of what is happening and how to stay safe without the news. “Now, we live in silence,” said a villager from Taung Kalay village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State.

Before the coup, people could share information about their areas on social media. Now the military junta routinely arrests reporters and anyone who records incidents with their mobile phones. At the time of writing, the junta has arrested 166 individuals who violated the social media ban and sentenced more than 50 to imprisonment in HURFOM-targeted documentation areas.

The following are cases of human rights violations reported by the HURFOM fieldworkers. None of the victims or their families have received any type of reparations.



Airstrikes

In addition to ground strikes, the military junta continues to deploy air strikes. In Taung Kalay village, Kyaikmaw Township, two civilians were killed and eight others injured during an attack from the air at 5 AM. Locals who were already fleeing conflict reported a military helicopter began to fire. The aircraft bombed several shells from morning to afternoon. The military's ground base Artillery Battalion located on Khuna-Khway hill, on the border of Mudon and Kyaikmayaw, also fired continuously with heavy weapons towards Taung Kalay village and around the villages.



Arbitrary Arrest

Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances also persist in Mon State. A civilian was arrested in Thaton Township and had been missing since he was arrested on May 17th. Ko Zeyar Lin, aged 45, and a resident of Dae-Ba-Reim Village, was arrested by the military-backed forces without a warrant or explanation. The HURFOM Thaton Documentation team said the junta administration accused him of supporting the local PDF active in Thaton areas.

Similarly, five youths aged 20 to 25, residents of Kyar-Inn village, Mawlamyine Township, had been missing for several days in May 2022. According to eyewitnesses, junta forces arrested them and forced them to be porters. Residents suspect that the young boys were taken to southern Kyaikmayaw Township, which borders Karen State.

Pado Saw Soe Myint, the Chairman of the KNU Brigade 1 in Thaton District, confirmed that the junta and BGF arrested 100 local villagers and forced them to be human shields and porters at Lay Kay Kaw Camp.

Members of pro-democracy parties are also regularly targeted and have their homes raided. The junta targets their family members if the person of interest is not home or cannot be found. On 14 May, residents living in Yangyi Aung Ward, Ye Township, had the military junta force their way into their homes. At least five individuals were taken away at midnight. The men arbitrarily arrested were relatives of U Myo Win, a member of the National League for Democracy and a Member of Parliament. He has been in hiding for almost a year.

In a related case, a source close to the family said Ko Thae Hein, a lawyer and a son of former Hluttaw Speaker Daw Tin Ei, was arbitrarily abducted by the junta special police on May 13th from his home and was taken to the Waekalae Detention Center in Thanbyuzayat, Mon State. After his arrest, the junta forces began to track about 40 contacts which were linked to Ko Thae Hein since his arrest.

The junta's arbitrary arrests of civilians without arrest warrants are ongoing in Mawlamyine, Mon State. It was reported that at 6:30 pm on June 15, more than 30 members of the Burma Army, travelling in nine military vehicles, arrived in Zay Gyo Ward, Moulmein, and abducted a 35 years-old man and a young woman. Another two local sources confirmed that the same night, two more young men were arrested in the Daungzayat Ward, Mawlamyine, after the junta troops conducted surprise midnight guest checks. Locals believed the checks were all in connection with the military junta's attempts to squander the Spring Revolution.

The junta arrested two youths and a former schoolteacher after a drone attacked a junta military intelligence bureau office in Thanbyuzayat Township on 16 June 2022. They were all accused of being linked with the drone attack conducted by the People's Defense Force (PDF) on June 14, 2022.

Education is yet another pillar that has been attacked by the military junta, as students must keep low profiles. Five young students from Mawlamyine University were arbitrarily abducted in midnight raids on 3 October 2022. It is unknown what charges they were arrested on, but witnesses said some of them were beaten. Late at night, junta soldiers and officers from the General Administration Department arrived with three military trucks. They knocked on the doors of male hostels in Zeya Myaing Ward, Mawlamyine. Five students, including Soe Win Tun, a second-year student, were taken away, according to a witness. They were taken away and have still not been heard from.

The junta forces arbitrarily arrested two more young villagers in Zeyarmyaing Ward, Mawlamyine, Mon State, on October 6 after being accused of being associated with the local PDFs in their areas, as confirmed by the families. Mg Thein Zaw Latt, age

20, and Soe Win Htun, also age 20, both from Htnin-Yu village of Thanbyuzayat Township: “They are being detained and interrogated in Mawlamyine. I am worried about them being beaten. These boys are innocent. They’re just University students. I am sure they have never been involved with any armed resistance groups,” said a relative.

At the beginning of December 2022, the military deployed over one hundred troops to Ye Township, Mon State, and conducted large-scale area restrictions in southeastern parts of the township, repeatedly arresting and extorting targeted young people, according to the residents. On December 6 afternoon, four young men, originally from Alaesakhan village, Yebyu, were stopped for no reason at Ye-Exit-Cement Bridge and arrested. The reporters received two accounts of two out of four young men abducted. “I am still unsure why these young people were stopped and arrested. First, the security troops searched their motorcycles, bags, and bodies. Then, a soldier accused one of the young men of being a PDF member by showing a black and white A4 size warrant list. One of the four was arrested because he looked similar to the picture on the military’s arrest lists. All four were confirmed to have been arrested,” a source said.



Photo: The notorious Ye-Chaung Taung checkpoint operated by the Junta forces in Ye Township, Mon State.



Attacks Against Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders face constant threats to their safety and livelihoods for their outspoken criticism of the junta and for organizing pro-democracy activities. Most recently, the Burma Army's plans to build an airport in Mon State have led to backlash from local communities whose land is confiscated for the project. As the rest of the population faces worsening poverty, the regime's lack of care and attention to their well-being is evident through the construction of new infrastructure. Emergency assistance is urgently needed for impoverished populations, including rice, water, and medicine.

Further, the land grabs which have been occurring amidst the plans for the airport have included the removal of 70 homes in Nyaung Kone village in Mudon Township, Mon State. Villagers led by the local land rights defenders opposed the junta's plan because it was unlikely that they would receive any compensation for their confiscated land. Its construction could seriously affect the Mon community, particularly rice farmers and nearby land users.

On 15 August 2022, a group of junta-backed police forces arrested one of the landowners, Nai Kon Ba, age 55, from Nyaung Kone village, Muon Township, Mon State. They accused him of illegally providing misinformation to the locally based media agencies about the land confiscations. Nai Kon Ba was tortured and forcibly questioned about his contacts within the network of land activists, including the human rights defenders. Thus, most of them were forced to flee their villages and homes to the nearest areas controlled by the Karen Nation Union in Win Yay Township and Kyainnseikyi Township, Dooplaya District, from August 17th to date. The total number of those who fled to KNU Brigade No. 6 includes sixteen human rights defenders and six rice farmers (at least 22) from Mudon and eastern Thanbyuzayat.



Destruction of Property

An ongoing concern for civilians in Mon State is the fear of clashes between various armed opposition groups and the military junta and junta-backed militias. They are concerned over the possibility of being targeted by the regime and subsequently investigated, arrested and tortured. During the first week of July 2022, an unknown armed group invaded the No. 1023 Border Guard Force (BGF) military base near Htaw

Pa Law village, Hla Ka Zine village track, in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State. The BGF has since abandoned the base after it was burned down. Following this, they retaliated and searched vehicles passing through the checkpoint.

There have been frequent armed clashes in Kha Lae- Da Gon Die area, and the military base has been burnt down. Local villagers are afraid of being subjected to the junta's brute force. "They left their houses and fled," said a villager. Most people moved to Mudon Township, Mon State, until it was more secure to move back. Another local who spoke to HURFOM said. "I've closed my house and just come back once a week to check its condition. I'm worried the soldiers will burn down my empty house now that I've moved to Mudon."

Homes and properties are being destroyed and confiscated, including civilians' farms. From August 10 to 14, the junta forces from the South East Command, based in Mawlamyine, came and gave orders to forcibly demolish the farm huts built in the villages of Maekro, Kohpanaw, Kwan Ngan, and others in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State. They ordered approximately 50 farmers who lived on the farm to destroy the farm huts. If not, they'd burn them all down and penalize the owners. "We use these shelters to rest in the fields during farming. We have to destroy them out of fear. This order was to cut the shelters of the People's Defense Forces and other armed groups. However, this violates the civilians' rights to living and food security," a Civil Disobedience Movement school teacher, originally from Kyaikmayaw, expressed to HURFOM.

The Mon State junta forces have continued to seize homes and other property from pro-democracy activists, politicians, and those associated with the National Unity Government and its related organizations. HURFOM had documented cases of this throughout the year, including in September 2022, when the houses of Khun Myint Htun, Chairman of Pa'O People's Federal Council (PNFC), were seized by the junta. However, the military also targets places of worship and education. A Mon National Primary school at Yin Dein Village, southern Ye Township, Mon State, was set on fire and destroyed on 6 October 2022. Local villagers suspected that Infantry Battalion No.31 committed the arson.



Indiscriminate Firing

Indiscriminate firing, including the shelling of mortars and artillery, in civilian areas, are another example of deliberate attempts by the Burma Army to weaken support for resistance movements. An innocent local from Ye Township, Mon State, was shot dead by junta soldiers at the end of September 2022. U Win Khaing, age

43 and a resident of Bay-Kalwe village, was killed by Light Infantry Battalion 106 troops. According to local eyewitnesses working on the nearby rubber farm U Win Khaing was shot in his back by five gunshots from two military vehicles: “Gunshot wounds were found on the back of his head. It is possible that the soldiers shot U Win Khaing thinking he was a member of the PDF armed forces. As far as we know, he is an ordinary villager,” said an eyewitness. His body was taken away by a free funeral service from Moganin village, Lamine Town, Ye. Light Infantry Battalion 104, the nearest military force, has not admitted to the murder in yet another display of impunity. According to HURFOM documentation, this was the fourth instance of people being shot and killed by the junta in this area without justice since the coup.

Even the elderly are not safe or protected. A 50-year-old villager, U Pho Khet, was shot dead by the junta troops, and more than 20 villagers were arrested and used as human shields in Lae Thit village, Tanintharyi Township. On the evening of 18 June, the village head and villagers found the body of U Pho Khat, who had been shot dead by the junta troops, covered with branches near Lae Thit village. The junta troops arrested the villagers who could not escape from the village. All detainees were being held at the village’s monastery, where the junta troops are temporarily based in Lae Thit village.

The week prior, on 9 June 2022, three local youths were shot indiscriminately by an ambush patrol of the junta. Two died immediately. One was seriously injured in the leg. The junta patrol troops shot them while travelling from Thingangyun to Waku village, Dawei. They were shot at without warning. Another source also described the case: “These young men did not know that the Army was patrolling the area. The soldiers saw the three of them and shot for no reason. They were hit on the spot.”

Indiscriminate firing and targeting of innocent civilians remain a constant threat to the security of local people. On November 13, 2022, the junta shot and injured a 67-year-old Mon villager in Kyaikmayaw Township. Witnesses said Burma Army soldiers passed by and then fired at him. A local response team managed to transfer the patient to the hospital on the same day, where he remains in critical condition,” said a village committee member. This case was the latest in gunfire directed at innocent villagers.

On September 23 2022, at 2:00 AM, a young man from Kaloh village was shot and killed by the junta security troops in the town, Ye Township. Residents who witnessed the incident reported that the shooting happened during the curfew decree, increasing fears. The deceased is 35-year-old U Naing Oo, a resident of Kaloh Village, who was shot while leaving his home: “When he was walking and crossing that road, he was shot dead by the deployed army,” said another witness. He died on the spot due to the shooting. Naing Oo’s body was brought in a car and left at the village

entrance. “Another case of losing a villager that will end like this without getting any justice.” a young villager expressed.

These attacks are mounting and other indicators of the miscarriages of justice that are ongoing in Mon State. Victims are entitled to reparations and accountability.



Murder

On 3 May 2022, in the late afternoon, an armed clash between the local People’s Defense Force (PDF) and the military junta took place between San Pya and Hnin Zone villages in Ye Township. During the fighting, a pregnant woman visiting her family was killed. She hid and went to find water when she was shot in the head. Villagers were afraid to retrieve her body with concerns of also being fired at by the junta. The young victim was just 21 years old. The Burma Army was responsible for her death but refused to acknowledge it nor offer any reparations for the family.

Members of the NLD and pro-democracy affiliates also continue to be relentlessly targeted. A member of the NLD party chairman who was abducted by the junta forces on June 22, 2022, in Bilin Township, Mon State, was found dead in a ditch on July 7, 2022, according to the local villagers. U Kyaw Myo Min and his coworkers, U Pan Myint and U Ko Ko Maung were arbitrarily arrested by the junta forces in Paw Kee village, Bee Lin Township, Mon State.



Photo: Kyaw Myo Min, who was killed by the Junta forces in late June 2022. His body had been tied up and buried in a shallow grave in Kayin state’s Hpa-An township. He had been arrested in his hometown Bilin, Mon State, on June 22 2022, along with two other NLD members and a local villager from Bilin Township. Junta forces shot at them, and they were then arrested.



Rape and Sexual Violence

On 11 December 2022, a daughter and mother who were working at a rubber plantation located between San Pya and Hnin Zone villages, Ye Township, Mon State, were both raped by Burmese soldiers. The rape victim lived with the daughter's husband at the plantation. The daughter was pregnant. The soldiers were estimated to be troops from LIB No. 586 under the administration of Military Operation Management Command MOMC No. 19 based in Ye Town, Mon State, who came to the plantation when the daughter, her mother, and her husband were together. The junta ordered the husband to go into the village and buy them alcohol. After he left the plantation, the soldiers raped the mother and daughter. The victims have left the plantation and returned to their native village. Since the coup, it has become commonplace for authorities to neglect such criminal cases, even when they are reported to the police.



Theft, Extortion & Warrantless Raids

Cases of theft, extortion and raids by the military junta are rampant and continue due to the lack of reliable domestic accountability channels. Civilians have been forced to endure layer upon layer of uncertainty as their futures remain jeopardized due to the junta's growing presence and selfless acts of war. Extortion of local possessions and houses is being done systematically across the country. Junta forces threatened to burn villagers' homes and launch airstrikes following any attack that injured or killed their soldiers. The junta routinely attacks villages near mix-controlled areas in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State.

Meanwhile, the junta continues abusing their power by extorting civilians for their money, property, possessions, and even their time. Locals reported that in some villages in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, the junta is forcing them to serve as sentries to protect their Administration Offices, schools and other community perimeters from attack. Although village security falls under the junta troops' authority, the area's ongoing conflicts have resulted in the soldiers forcing the local civilians to guard the villages and the junta-related departments and buildings: "They have been forcing us to take sentry duties for almost a year and a half. They ordered us to work for free. This is a form of forced labour," said a civilian, age 45 who wished to remain anonymous.

In October 2022, the junta council in Mon State conducted a surprise check and raided market stall owners, then arbitrarily confiscated Thai goods and abducted at least eight business people in the Mawlamyine Dry Market, according to the victims' families. Among them, three medium-scale business owners were arrested for providing financial assistance to the local armed groups: "The junta confiscated Thai goods worth 80 million Myanmar Kyat without giving any reason. They took them with their Army lorries," said a witness.

"From my brother's shop, they confiscated more than 500 gallons of Thai cooking oil and MSG bags. These vendors have already paid taxes on all goods from the Thai-Burma border. Illegal trade is only tax evasion. This incident is just acting arbitrarily and misapplying with their power," said a family member of one of the business owners.

Tanintharyi Region

Armed conflict also continued across target areas, leading to growing levels of forced displacement. Civilians living in the Tanintharyi region have witnessed the rise of attacks perpetrated by junta-backed militias with an agenda that seeks to terrorize and intimidate innocent civilians. Their homes are raided, burned and scorched with no regard for the law. HURFOM has recorded several instances of civilians abducted and killed.

While some of the attacks appear random, others are targeted, including when it comes to human rights defenders. The situation is cause for alarm. Families are suffering from food shortages. Local aid organizations that used to deliver rice to these communities said the situation had not stabilized enough for them to return home. A HURFOM reporter noted that between December 4 and 10, the junta forcibly relocated another 400 local villagers living in Yadanap (Mining) village to the Myanmar-Thailand border: "Now the number of people is about 700, including children and the elderly who face risks," said a humanitarian aid worker.

The following are cases of human rights violations reported by the HURFOM fieldworkers. None of the victims or their families have received any type of reparations.



Arbitrary Arrest

Local villagers reported increasing cases of arbitrary arrest, particularly in Dawei. In the first week of August 2022, two internally displaced people (IDPs) could not access medical treatment. The victims were a 40-year-old man from A Ka Neat village and an 11-year-old child from Wa Zen Taw village. “The child frequently had epilepsy but had been able to access regular medical treatments in a nearby home at a clinic. Since the family had to flee, it was impossible to maintain regular treatments,” said a villager close to the family. The child and the man died at Yebyu IDP camp. Since July 30, 2022, the Burma Army has conducted military operations and established bases in villages in Yebyu Township.

Civilians have been taken away, tortured and killed by the military junta. On August 2nd, it was reported that five villagers were abducted from their homes and murdered. The Burma Army buried and concealed the bodies. Witnesses said screams and several gunshots were heard. The villagers unearthed the victims: U Saw Shi, Ko Zaw San, and Ko Thin Win: “I saw multiple wounds on their bodies. They must have been tortured harshly during the interrogation by the Burmese soldiers. They defied the orders of families and cremated them,” said a source who spoke to HURFOM.

Another person described the bodies inflicted with knife wounds, gunshot wounds, and many bruises sustained from beatings. “We know they are innocent because they are not associated with armed forces or political groups.” Bagaw Zun villagers who talked to a HURFOM reporter also confirmed that the remaining two are missing, and the families are still worried about their vitalities.

On 4 September 2022, three young people drove a car in Nyang Yangtaung Ward, Dawei. According to the local witnesses, a group of police forces and soldiers were conducting a security check on a vehicle, and three people were arrested. The second source also confirmed that the junta checked and arrested the Honda Fit car driver and pointed the guns at the three men, forced them to kneel on the street and started beating them: “They were likely included in the list of arrest warrants, and that was why the three young men were taken. Their names and addresses are still being investigated,” a 50-year-old man who talked to the reporters said. According to the HURFOM field research, approximately nineteen civilians were arrested in Dawei within a week, and only about eleven people were released by paying a ransom.

Throughout October 2022, HURFOM documented nearly a dozen cases of abductions and arbitrary arrests by the junta accusing people of loyalties to opposition forces. On 2 October, in Yebyu township, Dawei, at least thirteen youths were arrested over three

days. Some of them have been missing for weeks, according to family members. The reasons for most arrests are alleged communication, affiliation and support for the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and/or the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). On 28 September 2022, early in the afternoon, a 25-year-old named Ko Aung Thet Naing and Min Min, age 21, were arrested on unproven allegations of being involved in the pro-democracy struggle. They have since disappeared.

On October 7, 2022, at around 10:30 AM, a young woman, age 22, named Ma Tharaphu, was abducted by the joint forces of the junta military intelligence and pro-junta militia troops after a preliminary investigation, a local witness reported. "Ma Tharaphu, an ordinary villager, was arrested along with a motorcycle in Kyaukni Maw Village, Long Lon Township, Dawei District." The junta troops checked her phone and arrested her immediately. She is one of at least another three young villagers who were stopped and charged when the troops checked their cell phones.

On October 17, at 7:30 AM, local witnesses reported that the joint troops of junta forces and their sponsored militia troops abducted four local male villagers on accusations of being associated with the PDF. Two detainees out of four were identified as local villagers. The junta troops arrived with three military lorries and grabbed U Kyaw Maung and Ko Myint Aye, both from San Hlan village, Long Lon Township. Only two arrested men are known, and the other two are still being sought. However, they are just ordinary villagers. In a separate but related case on October 16, 2022, military troops arrived at Min Yet Village in Long Lon Township in the evening and inspected the residents. Three were arrested and sent to a military detention camp. All three have also disappeared until now.

Again, another woman was targeted on October 22, 2022, at 8:30 PM, when two residents from Long Lon Township, Dai were abducted by a military intelligence officer on accusations of supporting the resistance movement.. Ko Soe Soe, a male villager, 28, and Ma Mee Nge, a female villager, were arrested after returning from work. They were brought to the Army Lorry: "They both were detained at one of the cells in Long Lon SA-YA-HPA (Intelligence Bureau Detention Camp) and being interrogated with torture by the military intelligence official. They are likely to be charged under the Terrorism Act," a source said. According to HURFOM fieldworker's records, at least 12 residents were arbitrarily arrested last week by the Junta forces in Long Lon Township, Dawei.

These are not isolated incidents. The abductions are part of a broader goal by the military to completely dissolve support for the Spring Revolution through fear and violence. These attempts have been unsuccessful as advocacy to hold the regime accountable for its crimes continues.

According to the local villagers, arbitrary arrests and using local civilians as human shields in eastern Dawei continued. On November 2, 2022, local villagers reported that the junta forces arrested at least nine villagers, including women, and later used them as human shields. They did this while fighting the PDFs to prevent ambushes, shots, and potential landmine attacks: “We received all nine cases of Junta forces arresting the villagers from three villages, and seven of them confirmed using as human shields by the Junta soldiers. The first seven were arrested on 2 November by military council soldiers in Dar-Twe-Kyauk and Nyang Chaung village, East Dawei Township. These arrests included two women from Nyaung Chaung village at 4 PM. All of them live as betel nut plantation workers,” an anonymous 35-year-old villager reported. One of the reporters close to a village committee of Nyaung Chaung received the detainees’ accounts. Those arrested are Aung Ko Htwe, Saw El Doh Htoo, U Hpaw Law, Hpa Su Karm, Ma Yin Htwe, Naw Phyoe, and Naw Hpaw Shee.

Between 18 and 19 November 2022, HURFOM reported that sixteen people were arrested at various checkpoints operated by the junta forces in northern Tanintharyi, according to the field records received by HURFOM. Sources confirmed that two female detainees were released after being forced to pay high ransoms. The junta arbitrarily arrests people through checkpoints, door-to-door inspections, and midnight raid operations. At 8:30 PM on November 15, 2022, a resident said junta troops raided some homes in Daung Ngu Ward and arrested six young men and two women on the pretext of a household registration list.

According to family members, a pregnant woman about to give birth detained by the military council in Dawei has not been released yet. On December 5, 2022, families and friends appealed the arrests of four residents, including two women arbitrarily abducted. One was a pregnant woman from Talaing Hetein Ward, Dawei. She is innocent and not affiliated with any political movements, said her family members and close friends. The arrested people include Ma Mee Maw’s mother and two siblings. No one knows where all four arrested, including Ma Mee Maw, were detained.”



Destruction of Property

For many civilians in Burma, their homes, once places of peace and refuge, have now become war zones. Inundated with a growing military junta presence, residents have fled to caves for safety and regularly sheltered in make-shift bunkers.

Junta forces looted and burned homes in Taung Pyouk village track, Dawei. At least ten civilian houses were burnt down between July 15 - 18, 2022, according to the local villagers:

“The junta forces burnt down at least five houses only in Ah Lae Su village, which is part of the Taung Pyouk village track, located in Tha Yet Chaung Township,” a local villager told the reporter.

Before burning the houses, a local source said the soldiers removed all the valuable belongings from the homes. Another recalled, “I heard gunshots. There were no armed clashes. It’s just random shooting from one side. I moved my belongings with a truck to Thel Chaung Gyi village,” said a 35 years-old villager from Ah Lae Su village. The military forces have bases in the Mya Nadi Mount in Taung Pyouk village track, and they have been randomly shooting at nearby villages with heavy weapons every day, according to local sources.

The junta forces have also carried out their campaign of deliberately destroying civilian properties. In Kyun-Su Town, Myeik District, troops destroyed 14 houses and seized land plots: “They destroyed and took the land with no compensation. They justified it by saying it was for building the electricity department compound and office.” The director of the General Administration Department and the person in charge of the electricity department were the ones who gave the orders for confiscating the land and removing the houses. The dates this occurred were between September 3 and 6, 2022 at Ward no.3, Kyun-Su Town.

Reporters tried to contact one of the landowners, and she said most of the male heads of households living in these homes are currently working in the fishing boats. Some of them lived as day labourers in the plantation and orchards, and the rest of the family members found it difficult to move during the rainy season. The incidents happened while their husbands were away. A member of the destroyed family confided that there was no life security, food, or place to live.

The growing military presence has made villagers fearful of leaving their homes. The junta forces have been patrolling around the villages with approximately 200 soldiers in the Kanbauk village, Ka Laing Aung township, Dawei. Villagers dare not travel or go to the plantations. At least five villages have been under the control of the junta. More than 200 soldiers are based there. Locals are worried.

On September 9, 2022 at 9:30 PM, the joint forces of pro-junta militias and military forces (approximately 40 troops) entered the Nyaung Zin village, Thayetchaung Township, Dawei, and fired discriminately at the civilians’ houses and harmed at least three women villagers. Three of them were shot in the shoulder and arm. The indiscriminate gunfire wounded Ma Thin Myint, Daw Moe, and Daw Aye Shin. The junta and militias illegally burglarized villagers’ locked homes by kicking them in. They kicked the door and forced it open. Homeowners were taken out at gunpoint. Nyaung Zin villagers have kept organizing silent strikes and threatened not to go

on any more strikes, and if they went out again, they threatened to burn down the whole village. In the case of terrorist attacks and lootings, the militias and soldiers mainly enter houses with shops and take valuable things such as phones and gold items by force.

Later that night, at 3:30 a.m., a junta military council of Light Infantry Battalion #406, a convoy with 17 military trucks, entered Wa-kone village in Dawei Township by indiscriminately firing heavy weapons. Seven homes were destroyed. Villagers had to flee because of the attacks. The junta spent a night in the villages and stole the villagers' belongings, including motorbikes and valuable items.

Civilian homes are primarily destroyed after civilians have fled looming attacks. Soldiers invade their villages, force their way into homes, steal food possessions and ruthlessly scatter their materials before leaving. Sometimes the junta will scorch the village altogether. Local villagers in Yebyu Township, Dawei, reported that their locked homes were destroyed after they fled to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade No. 4 of eastern Dawei. Their remaining belongings and properties were stolen and ruined by the junta: "On October 2, 2022 at least 20 houses left by the homeowners who fled to the eastern Dawei for security were ruined by the junta forces Light Infantry Battalion 406 and 401," said a local source.

The Burmese troops destroyed most locked doors, including gas station owners' houses and those selling goods in the village. Junta forces seized at least eight motorcycles in the villages and a truck. Many homes are no longer in good condition. A 45-year-old male villager from Hnan Kyae told HURFOM reporters. "I am in a situation where I don't know when I'll be allowed to go home. I can't think about how to rehabilitate. We constantly need food and medical aid."



Photo: One of the houses in Yebyu Township, in Dawei, after the junta forces looted, destroyed the civilian's property in a midnight raid.

By 1 November 2022, HURFOM reported an increase in property destruction by the junta in Southeastern Burma. On 4 November 2022, the joint forces of the junta battalion No. 408 and their backed militia forces entered the Mudoo village in Nabulae, Yebyu, Dawei, where they forced open the doors and shops in the town belonging to villagers. They seized belongings worth up to 10 million Myanmar kyat (approximately 4700 USD). A local villager who spoke with HURFOM reporters said junta soldiers kicked the locked doors with their boots and guns. Some stole items from ownerless homes and shops: “These incidents happened early morning, but the soldiers came to the village again at 10 AM, after one of their informants was shot. They destroyed the houses and properties of the villagers with anger. They took everything they saw,” residents said.

At around 8:30 AM the next day, another group of soldiers arrived. Again, they broke down four vendor shop doors and stole dry foods, canned foods, and bottles of alcohol. They destroyed two shops. In total, at least twelve houses and four shops were raided. Even internally displaced people (IDPs) who have abandoned their villages in fear have had their remaining possessions destroyed by the military. Junta forces destroyed the leftover homes and robbed the valuables left by the IDPs and local inhabitants affected by armed clashes in Dawei, according to those who fled the junta offensives in Tanintharyi Region, Southern Burma.

On 8 November 2022, junta forces attacked four villages in Myeik District, Southern Tanintharyi Region, killing at least 16 civilians’ houses by setting a fire. The indiscriminate gunfire seriously injured a woman villager from Sedawyar village while they entered, and she remains in critical condition. The villages attacked and burned down by the junta were Tapo village, Too-Ywa village, Sedawyar, and Kye-Ywa village, located under the administration of Pa Law township: “Sixteen houses in total turned into ashes, and a female villager was injured,” said a local.

Raids are warrantless; in doing so, the junta steals possessions that they see as of value, including livestock. On 11 November 2022, the junta broke into at least 30 homes in Wakone village, Dawei. The soldiers, temporarily stationed in Wa-kone village for the night, seized valuables and livestock, including chickens, ducks, and goats. On 13 November 2022, the junta left Wakone village. Residents said the troops had moved their army camps to the neighbouring town, Thin-Gan-Tone, Dawei, for about two days. They continue to break into civilian homes and steal from them in yet another act of lawlessness.



Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is taking a toll on civilians, including in the Tanintharyi region. Villagers in northern Yebyu township claimed that there had been no compensation for their houses destroyed by a project survey conducted by Yadanar Natural Oil and Gas group in February 2022. During this time, officials from the “Yadanar Natural Oil and Gas Project” surveyed Pauk Pin Kwin. The survey destroyed twelve houses, and those who suffered property losses have not received compensation. The Yadanar Natural Oil and Gas Project bought land plots in the village in 2002/2003, but the company did nothing with the land.

Eventually, local villagers built houses on these plots. After the coup, the company showed renewed interest in their project. Oil companies, like TOTAL, chose to withdraw from the project in light of human rights abuses conducted by the military since the coup. Only Nippon Oil and Gas Exploration and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, controlled by the military junta, continue to support the Yadanar project.



Indiscriminate Firing

On 3 June 2022, HURFOM documented the case of a fourteen-year-old girl who was killed by the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 404 in Dawei District. She was the daughter of a military junta soldier. Ma Leh Leh Win was an eighth-grade student living in the junta barracks with her family near Sone Sin Phyar Village, Thayet Chaung Township. Another civilian named U Thet Htwe, aged 30, was also hit and killed on the way to his farm and died on the spot. According to a local villager, another two villagers were wounded, and one was in critical condition.

HURFOM received reports from Palaw Township that four people were seriously injured by artillery shells indiscriminately fired by the junta on the morning of December 8. At 8 AM, about 20 artillery shells were fired by Infantry Battalion No. (285) 2/4 in Palaw, Southern Tanintharyi_Region into Lakku village, harming four villagers; a man and woman of four were reportedly in critical condition, and several homes were destroyed.

One shell fired by Infantry Battalion #285, hit the house of U Nyan Kywe, a resident of Lakku village, harming U Nyan Kywe and his wife, Ma Bae-U, who were inside the house. Another two villagers confirmed as U Naung Ni and U Pho Wa were from the same village, were hit by shells from nearby. Those struck by heavy weapons

are receive medical treatment at Pulau hospital. “Not all the injured villagers get the chance to receive medical treatment. All are being treated by the community who know first aid treatment. Two are facing a worrying situation,” said a local reporter who described the situation.

The last two weeks of December 2022 saw an increase in the junta’s heavily armed attacks. As a result of the clashes between the Karen opposition forces, between 2,000 to 3,000 villagers from twenty different villages fled their residences and have been unable to return to Pu Law Township, Myeik Tanintharyi Region. Some villagers fled to cities, and others sought shelter at nearby plantations.



Murder

On 20 May 2022, a 10-year-old boy and a villager were shot dead by the junta’s indiscriminate fire in Taku village in Tanintharyi Township, according to frontline emergency response volunteers who witnessed the incident. Both victims died on the spot. People from the same town as the boy said he had a mental illness and was shot in the back while running, fearful and trying to escape. Another male villager, aged 50, was shot and killed. In Taku village and Thein-Daw village, Mergue District, about 15 villagers were arrested. Some were forced to carry loads as porters.

Tanintharyi region has also experienced brute force by junta-backed militias. Two villagers were killed by soldiers supported by the regime, which destroyed a house in Eai Ka Ni village, Yebyu Township. The group arrested Ko Myo Ko and Ko Yan Pine Soe of A Ka Ni village and killed them near Watt Chaung village. Then, they abandoned their bodies and scattered their group’s logos around the scene, reported a resident. The group invaded a house owned by an NLD party supporter to arrest him. Because their target was not home, they detonated a bomb in the house.

Civilians are not safe in the custody of the military junta. On 15 June 2022, around 4:00 am, 12 junta-sponsored para-militia forces arrived in Ekni Village, Yebyu Township, Dawei, to conduct a crackdown. Two villagers, Ko Myo Ko, age 22, and his friend Ye Pai Soe, age 23, were abducted and then killed, according to local witnesses. During their crackdown operation in the village, a National League for Democracy member, Kyi Ngwe’s home, was also bombed. Indiscriminate gunshots were fired at the village, according to the villagers.

In a similar violent incident, a 50-year-old man from Ka Nyin Inn village, from the Wun Ford village track, Yebyu Township, was killed at his home by an unknown group on June 16 2022. Since the coup, the military has frequently killed innocent civilians in the Tenasserim Division. Other armed and violent groups like the Pyu Saw Htee and Black Kite Brotherhood are believed to be sponsored by the junta. They have targeted family members of the NLD supporters and the People Defense Forces (PDF).

Civilians, including the elderly, have not been spared. On 26 June 2022, joint troops of the military junta and soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion No.46 raided five homes in Longlone Township, Dawei. A 60-year-old couple was arrested and had their hands tied behind their backs before being shot to death at close range. The victims were residents of Kadak Gyi village, U Thaung Win, age 61, male, and Daw Win Aye, age 62, female. Homes in Kadagyi village were also destroyed, and some valuables and banknotes were stolen.

On 6 December 2022, at 8 AM, an innocent Dawei resident was shot dead in his house by the junta's indiscriminate firing. Several soldiers, temporarily situated in the village primary school, entered and opened fire randomly in Thin-Gan-Tone village. U Than Win, age 57, who stayed in his residence, was struck and killed. "He was found dead at home with several gunshot wounds. The soldiers unexpectedly came and indiscriminately opened fires for twenty minutes. Most villagers had already fled their homes," said a local.

A 50-year-old woman from Thin-Gan-Tone village told HURFOM on condition of anonymity:

"The soldiers opened fire for a long time. My daughters and I had to flee. We have been running from clashes all year, three times this month. How can we work and live like this?"



Theft, Extortion & Warrantless Raids

Cases of theft, extortion and raids by the military junta are rampant and continue due to the lack of reliable domestic accountability channels. Civilians have been forced to endure layer upon layer of uncertainty as their futures remain jeopardized due to the junta's growing presence and selfless acts of war.

The attacks in the Tanintharyi region are becoming more violent and more frequent. HURFOM has been documenting the rise in hostilities threatening civilian safety and livelihoods.



Violence Against Women and Sexual Harassment

Women remain profoundly unsafe in the crossfire of violence and the presence of the military regime. At 6:00 AM on 28 December 2022, a local woman from Yebyu township died on the spot after being hit by military lorries on the road to Dawei: “A woman named Pan Ei Phyu, age 20, a resident of Zee-Kya village of Yebyu, died after being hit by one of the lorries of the junta,” said a witness. There were about 14 military lorries with soldiers and ammunition in each truck. Families said no army member had come to confess or acknowledge this murder. The families were advised to go to the police station to open a case because the army committed this killing. However, no one dares to open a case. Local social support groups have transported the deceased woman’s body to Yebyu Public Hospital.

Women have experienced worsening cases of harassment by the Burma Army soldiers. Security forces verbally abuse women at Kan Bauk, Yebyu, and Dawei checkpoints. Since the attempted coup, the junta has increasingly established checkpoints in the Kan Bauk region of Yebyu Township, northern Tanintharyi Region. Security forces have routinely been harassing and verbally abusing women who cross these checkpoints. They stop women, ask for their phone numbers and Facebook account details, and verbally abuse them. “They often let the boys go after being stopped, they stopped our motorbike, and I thought they were also going to check on us. But they said, ‘you’re beautiful. Where are you from?’ They verbally abused us. After checking our phones, they asked for our numbers and Facebook accounts,” said a woman who had experienced this type of harassment by the junta. When the security forces do not get what they want, they don’t let the women go on, preventing them from turning around and returning home.

In addition to the junta making a mockery of the rule of law, they continue deploying strategies and activities that terrorize local populations. Across HURFOM’s target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region, people of all ages and backgrounds are targeted. On 2 September 2022, four young nursing students were arrested, and one of them was sent to a notorious camp known as the “MI detention center.”

A witness described that these four young men were beaten and arrested by junta soldiers while the troops raided the hostels: “They came with no arrest warrants but complete lists of who they wanted and arrested four of these students.” They are still under investigation, according to friends and families. Another local civilian from Painnae Taw confirmed that in the last two days, junta forces have been checking the families’ registration lists and guest checks in some wards in Dawei downtown.

Conclusion

The reporting by HURFOM has led to the conclusion that human rights violations will continue with impunity without severe repercussions and intervention by the international community to hold the military accountable. The rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in southeastern Burma requires urgent and immediate attention as more lives are caught in the crossfire daily. International actors and UN bodies must support and enact a no-fly zone in Burma, a global arms embargo, and an urgent and immediate referral of the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court.

The junta is paving pathways for destruction as the country's prospects for democracy slowly deteriorate. Their desperate quests for power were apparent even before the attempted coup on 1 February 2021. They sought legitimacy through various diplomatic channels while the very institution of the Tatmadaw was becoming increasingly unpopular. Their tirade of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide is further evidence of the great lengths that the military junta is willing to go to invoke cruel means of control over the people of Burma.

And yet, a sentiment of hope, determination and adversity is still prominent throughout the country as rallying forces join together to defeat and dismantle the junta. The people on the ground in Burma are brave in their unwavering commitment to see an end to military rule. The international community must not let their struggle be in vain. They must use diplomatic tools and resources to engage meaningfully with civil society organizations and the National Unity Government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A referral of the situation on the ground in Burma is to be made immediately by the United Nations Security Council to the International Criminal Court.
2. Concerted and coordinated action by global actors for an urgently mandated global arms embargo which would prevent the free flow of weapons into the hands of the murderous junta.
3. Aviation fuel sanctions to put an effective end to the airstrikes in Burma, which have contributed to significant loss of life, particularly among innocent civilians.
4. Targeted sanctions on military junta officials and their families and holds on their financial assets and possessions undercut their ability to conduct corrupt business dealings abroad.
5. Strengthened and renewed protection mechanisms grant civilians who are vulnerable and at risk of assault a position where they can access justice referral and accountability pathways.
6. Renewed and continued funding support for local organizations responding to the needs of their communities on the ground. Crossborder aid pathways must be accessed, and all humanitarian aid in the hands of local actors.
7. Foreign investors in Burma must immediately cease their operations and withdraw their involvement from all development projects in the country, including but not limited to airports, seaports, and cement businesses.
8. An abrupt and immediate halt to the use of torture by the military junta, and further, we call for investigations to probe the unlawful deaths of civilians in Burma who have been tortured to death, as well as those who have been forced to endure trauma and long-term injuries as a result.

“We Dare Not Return”

Displacement and the Denial of Human Rights in Southeastern Burma



The Human Rights Foundation of Monland

March 2023