

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

Human Rights Situation in Mon State, Karen State & Tanintharyi Region

FEBRUARY
2023



Martial Law and the Devastating Toll on Civilians in Southeastern Burma as the Junta Continues to Commit Human Rights Violations With Impunity

FEBRUARY 2023

The third anniversary of the failed coup was commemorated on 1 February, 2023. To mark the day, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), called upon the international community to use their platforms and diplomatic will to change the deeply concerning trajectory of violence in Burma. It begins with measures and concrete steps that prosecute Min Aung Hlaing and end his legacy of tyranny.

Across the country, civilians participated in nationwide Silent Strikes to show their disdain and ongoing rejection of the military. Many photographs taken by the network reporters showed empty main roads in Southeastern Burma, including deserted streets, and markets.

In Southeastern Burma, particularly Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region, the Burma Army has committed murder, torture, sexual assault and rape, arbitrary arrests and destruction of property, and many others. Hundreds of people have been killed, while others face a lifetime behind bars. The regime has not held back in replacing judges with those advancing their militarized agenda. The atrocities perpetrated are ongoing. They are systematic, widespread, and without consequences. Without action, the junta-

backed battalions are encouraged to continue their campaign of terror.

Throughout February, HURFOM became increasingly concerned about the imposition of Martial Law by the junta across our target areas. On February 2, 2023, the military junta held a National Defense and Security Council meeting and declared that ‘absolute power,’ was granted to the Commander-in-Chief for the next six months.

As of February 3, 2023, the Burma Army had declared Martial Law in 37 of the 330 townships across the country, including Tanintharyi Region, five townships of Bago Region, Ye Township of Mon State, Kyainseikgyi and Kawkareik townships in Karen State. In Ye, Kyaik Hto and Bilin Townships of Mon State, Martial Law has been in effect for nearly two years.

On 17 February 2023, HURFOM released a briefing paper titled **“We Cannot Move Freely,”** which closely examines the impacts of Martial Law on civilians in Southeastern Burma. Several cases and testimonies from the community made clear that safe and secure access to their livelihoods has been seriously compromised. The impacts of Martial Law have been disastrous and are on a worsening the

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conditions of daily life for civilians. Shortly after the imposition of Martial Law in Mon State, the junta deployed more troops into Ye Township. One resident told HURFOM that military movements have increased, particularly at checkpoints: *“Security is getting tougher,”* said one resident.

In Ye Township, Mon State, three innocent civilians have been killed since the junta declared martial law on February 2. The military has not confessed to the killings, and the victims are still far from justice. Another case emerged on February 19, 2023. Witnesses reported that in the morning, the soldiers of Artillery Division - (317) shot and killed an innocent civilian, Ko Yue, age 40, husband of Ma Chone. Light Infantry Battalion No. 317 LIB No. 317 shot the victim while riding his bicycle to sell spinach at the market: “They are an ordinary family, living from hand to mouth, and very poor and need little money to survive daily. He was killed arbitrarily five days ago; however, no one from the junta has confessed to the killings,” a former village committee claimed.

Military affairs observers said that the junta’s declaration of Martial Law in many townships across the country signals more brutal oppression in pro-democracy groups, civilians, and local resistance armed forces strongholds. However, it also indicates that the junta is losing on multiple battlefronts and are taking vengeful steps to try and curb

the widespread rejection of their illegitimate rule. Youth, in particular, have been leading a pro-democracy movement that calls for an immediate end to military rule.

An additional concern is the increased use of banned landmines in Martial Law imposed areas, including southern Mon state. During the first three weeks of the month, at least three civilians were seriously injured by landmines planted by the junta, according to reports from HURFOM fieldworkers. As written by the Associated Press, Burma has not signed the United Nations Mine Ban Treaty, which was adopted in 1997.

The most recent landmine victim was Nai Nyunt Wei, age 40, originally from Mawkanin village, Ye Township, Mon State, who was seriously injured by a landmine near a bridge on February 17, near the notorious Infantry Battalion of Junta No. 106. Earlier in the month, on 2 February 2023, a 55-year-old man from the same village returned from his plantation by motorbike and stepped on a landmine near Joe Ta Dar stream. He suffered a leg injury and was treated at the Lamine Hospital.

The risk of death and severe injury by landmines has increased safety concerns for local people who fear going to work on their farms and rubber plantations. Consequently, they have begun to abandon their livelihoods:

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“The use of landmines is cruel and disgusting,” said a local human rights educator from Ye Township. They continued:

“They are using these weapons and directly targeting civilians, placing them in plantations, yards, homes, and even roads and bridges. The world must urgently respond to these terrorist forces to stop the use of landmines and to ensure those responsible for war crimes meet justice.”

Another social worker who spoke to HURFOM called for immediate assistance:

“There is an urgent need for a scaled-up humanitarian response that provides proper psychosocial and rehabilitative support. Many conflict-affected victims need food, especially those forced to live under Martial Law.”

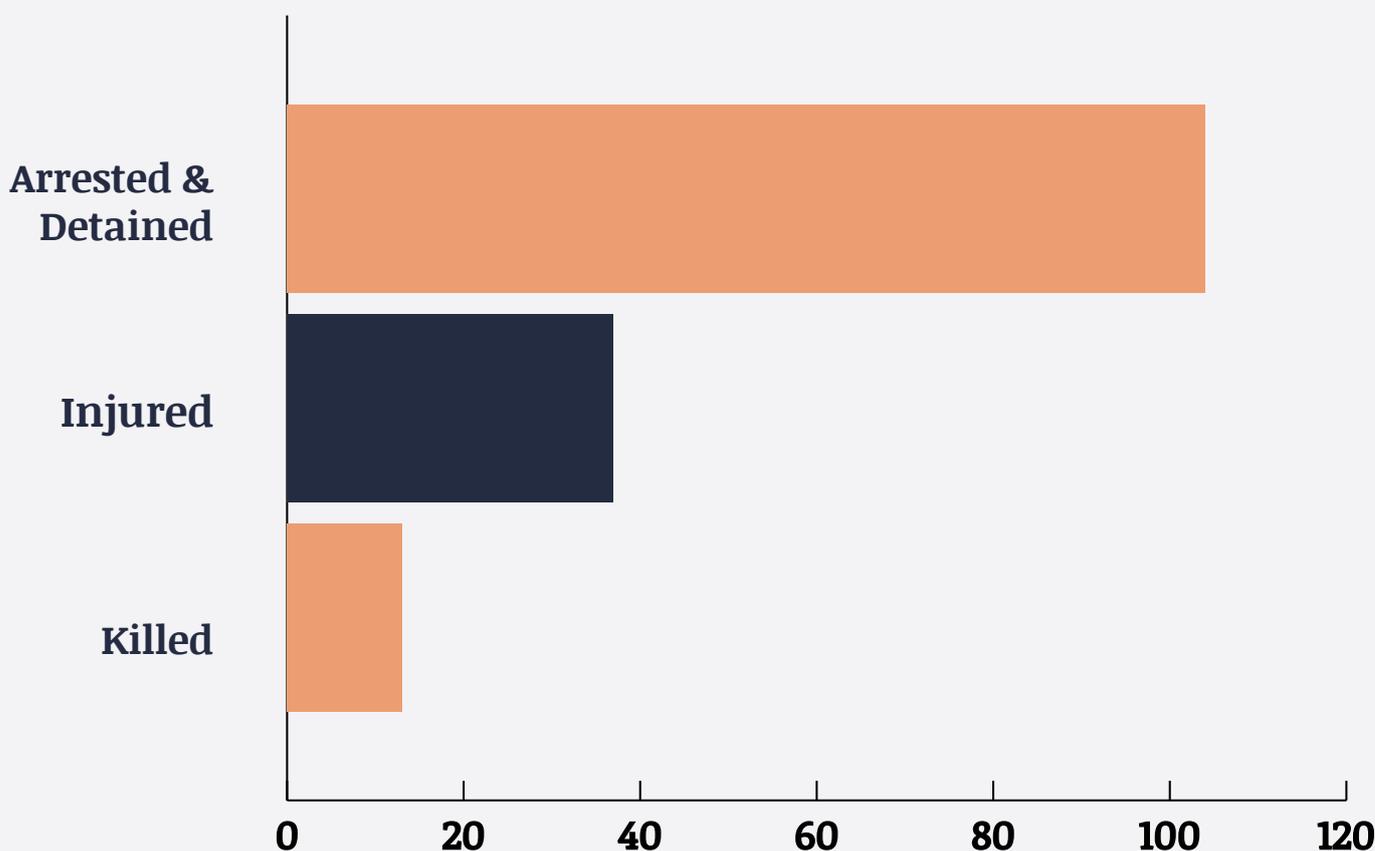
HURFOM remains concerned about escalating human rights violations being committed by the Burma Army in Southeastern Burma. The imposition of Martial Law and the placement of landmines in townships across the country is unjustified and threatens the rights of all people.

The current conditions will worsen with no international community intervention. Burma’s conflict is unique because it is the world’s longest-running civil war. HURFOM calls for an immediate end to impunity and an end to the violence.

SCALED UP HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

HURFOM fieldworkers continue to take great risks to document the human rights violations being perpetrated in target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region. By the end of **February 2023**, HURFOM recorded **least 65 arrested, 39 detained, 37 injured and 13 killed.**

Civilians Arrested, Injured & Killed in February 2023 in Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region



Pro-Democracy Activists targeted by the junta

12

PROTESTS ACROSS TARGET
AREAS IN FEBRUARY 2023

8

TANINTHARYI
REGION

2

MON STATE

2

KAREN STATE



16,900+

CIVILIANS DISPLACED ACROSS TARGET AREAS

CIVILIANS TARGETED IN MON, KAREN STATE
& TANINTHARYI REGION

15+

DISMISSED FOR
INVOLVEMENT
IN THE CIVIL
DISOBEDIENCE
MOVEMENT

3+

PROTESTERS/
ACTIVISTS
SENTENCED IN
JUNTA COURTS

2+

ENFORCED
DISAPPEARANCES
BY THE MILITARY



KAREN STATE

8000+ Newly Displaced

12 Injured, 3 Killed



Mon State



Tanintharyi Region

Violence in Karen State continues to take a devastating toll on civilians. The situation around Kyon Doe is more stable, but villagers are still frightened. Heavy fighting took place between the junta and joint forces of the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) from January 22 to 26, 2023, around Kan Ne village, Kawkareik Township. This led to 10,000 villagers fleeing. In addition, more than three dozen homes were burnt down, according to HURFOM reporters.

“We hope that the situation stabilizes. Some villagers have started returning to their homes. But others dare not go back. They are still staying at the homes of their family members.”

The junta launched artillery and air attacks during the offensive, mainly targeting villages. “There are concerns that there might be artillery shells that did not explode, and villagers should check their places carefully before they return,” advised a villager helping to clean up the battleground.

“There is currently no military movement, but I’ve advised villagers to be cautious,” said the social worker volunteer.

Armed opposition to the junta has been fierce, and the Burma Army has encountered significant losses. In response, they retaliated and targeted civilian areas. On 9 February 2023, a local church was destroyed by the Burmese military airstrikes in Dooplaya District, Karen State, in areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU).

Between February 3 and 16, the junta forces fired artillery mortars more than twenty times into four different village tracts in Kawkareik Township and southern Kyainnseikyi Township. As a result, twenty-two homes in three villages were obliterated, and at least six people were injured.

On the evening of February 14, around 11 PM, three fighter jets of the junta struck Lu Thaw of KNU's Brigade 5 Administrative areas. Eight bombs were fired into Debuno village, hitting and burning six houses. The next day, three more junta-backed fighter jets flew from Lu Thaw and six more bombs were fired into Pedae Kae Village. The attack destroyed a primary school, including seven public buildings, six houses, and three local shops. The attacks also demolished livestock and farm tools such as tractors, motorcycles and rice mills. In total, more than 3 million Thai Baht (approximately 87,099.15 USD) worth of damages was incurred in losses.

At the end of the month, on 22 February, junta forces again fired indiscriminately heavy weapons into Karen villages in Phyu township, KNU Brigade two area, killing an innocent woman. Two children, ages 5 and 12, were seriously injured, and two innocent people were arbitrarily arrested and then tortured.

Internally displaced people who have fled conflict are being targeted in the areas where they are sheltering. On February 19, around midnight, the junta airforce shelled an area where villagers who had escaped fighting hid in the southern part of Kawkareik, KNU Brigade 6. At least three IDPs, including a child, were injured. A local service provider team member confirmed that three individuals, Naw Hla Htwe, 36, Saw Pha Kyaw Do, 44, and a 14-year-old girl, were injured.

“Although the military targets the People’s Defense Forces, their attacks affect innocent people. Now, they repeatedly attack people who fled their homes. They are committing war crimes. We urgently need help from those who can stop these terrorist groups,” a local emergency response member said.



MON STATE

1400+ Newly Displaced

11 Injured, 3 Killed



Karen State



Tanintharyi Region

People from the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), including doctors and teachers, continued to be targeted by the junta. Family members reported that the Mon State junta forces had opened a case under Penal Code 505 against a CDM school teacher named Ma Phyu Phyu Win, age 40, who was abducted by the junta's Military Intelligence troops in mid-January 2023. Ma Phyu Phyu Win is a teacher with 15 years of experience. She lived and served as a teacher in the Pein-Ne-Teik ward, Mudon Township:

“Including Ma Phyu Phyu Win, about thirteen CDM teachers were arrested in the whole Mudon township because of their activism, political beliefs, and for standing up for the Spring Revolution,” said a lawyer.

Meanwhile, there are ongoing reports of arbitrary arrests and unlawful detainment of innocent civilians. As of February 9, 2023, the junta forces and the Township General Administrative Department arrested at least four Ye Township residents and accused them of supporting the armed opposition movement.

Nai Aung Kyaw Oo, age 39, was arrested while he was at his home and, “was taken away in a military vehicle wearing black clothes with a hood,” said an eyewitness from the village. He added

that Nai Oo was detained in the LIB 588 army camp when he reported this information.

“Three more villagers from Ye downtown and a Hnin Sone village were also arrested following the case of Nai Oo. Soldiers came by Army Lorries along with the Village Ward Chiefs. They raided suspected houses and abducted the inhabitants. All detainees were arrested for allegedly supporting the resistance movement,” said a source from Hnin Sone village, who spoke to reporters.

“Until now, all detainees’ families have not been allowed to see them,” he continued.

In Ye Township, Mon State, on February 11 at 5 PM, locals said indiscriminate shells fired by the junta killed a Novice and injured a monk from Ro-Hpo-Gaw Monastery. The shots were confirmed to have been fired by Junta's Artillery Regiment No. 317. This battalion operates under Military Operation Management Command No. 19. Seven shells exploded near the monastery.

On 13 February, Buddhist monks were again targeted. The Infantry Battalion No. 9 based in Thaton, fired, which caused an explosion in a Buddhist monastery. It seriously injured an 11-year-old Novice and two monks.



Tanintharyi region

7500x+ Newly Displaced

14 Injured, 7 Killed



Karen State



Mon State

On the evening of 3 February 2023, joint troops from the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 406 and their alliance forces committed an extra-judicial killing after torturing at least three local villagers in Longlong Township, Dawei, on the same day. The victim is U Tin Laung, age 50, and a resident of Minn Yut village, Long Lon Township:

“As far as I know, he has been living as an ordinary villager like us, never getting involved in the Spring revolution over the past years. The junta council forces and militias shot him.”

The junta forces also burned the house of U Tin Laung. According to other sources, at least three men were severely beaten by their guns as the LIB 406 stopped and interrogated them about the location of local People’s Defense Forces (PDFs)

Between 3 and 7 February 2023, in Dawei District Yebyu Township, family members and colleagues said the junta forces arbitrarily abducted at least six local people without arrest warrants. Three of the six detainees were women and an 18-year man. These are the cases:

Case 1 - February 4, 2023: Around 1 AM, an eyewitness and a family confirmed that the junta raided the house of Ma Thet Thet Wai and Ma Mu Mu, both age 30 and abducted them while they were sleeping. There was no reason for their arrest.

On the same day, the troops incorporating 15 soldiers of the junta’s Mawawaddy Navy Command, based in Kanbauk, Yebyu, arrived in two lorries and inspected civilian homes for the guest registration permits and lists. They abducted a young woman, Ma Thae Lay, age 20, at 2 AM.

Case 2 - On February 5 at 8:00 AM, Ko Thet Oo, who was in contact with Ma Thet Thet Wai (from the first case), was summoned by the police station and was arrested by the Navy at the police station in Kan Bauk, Yebyu.

Case 3: A Kanbauk resident, Ko Thet Aung, age 36, who runs a motorcycle repair shop in front of the military council's Administrative Office, was arrested. In the following days, two of his co-workers, both youth, were charged.

Women are also being increasingly targeted. Local residents stated that five local women were arbitrarily arrested by the Junta's Navy Command, based in Kanbauk, Yebyu. Those arrested are residents of Kanbauk Town, Ma Cho Aung, Ma Mi Than Kywe, Ma Thet, Ma Mar Wei, Ma Than Soe and Ma Ywet Nu Wai. The family and neighbours confirmed the perpetrators were from the Mawrawaddy Naval Command of the Burma Army, Yebyu Township:

“The incidents occurred on 9 February, at 1 AM. Soldiers arrived with about five military lorries, violently raided the women's residence, and arrested them with their handpone devices,” said one of the friends of the detainees.

“The individuals being arrested are relatives and friends. The junta has been patrolling this area for almost four days already. I am unsure if the arrested women were associated with the current movements. Still, they seem like ordinary civilians who live as vendors,” said one of the locals living in Kanbauk.

Earlier in the month, the junta in Yebyu had arrested three civilians, Ma Mee Thet, Ma Thay Lay, and Ko Thet Oo, with no arrest warrants.

Civilians who spoke to HURFOM reported that more than 165 houses in their village, Kadae, Palaw, the southern township of Tanintharyi, were burned in two days by the junta forces and said everything they had worked for in their lives was now gone.

Kadae village, Palaw township, has approximately 400 households according to the census, and the town was included in the Junta's Martial Law decree imposed on February 2 of this year:

“Those burned houses and buildings including a monastery, vehicles, motorcycles, and properties worth 800 million Myanmar Military Kyat,” as estimated by a 35-year-old villager who fled. Between February 15 and 20 February 2023, more than 2,000 residents of Kade village have taken refuge in the nearby forests and farms. They need urgent aid.

Members of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and their family members also continue to be targeted by the junta. Arbitrary arrests are ongoing in Palaw, southern Tanintharyi Region, where Martial Law has been declared. The junta arrested CDM school teachers, civil servants from different departments, and former ward administrators.

Out of 20, an estimated 17 school teachers hiding in various neighbourhoods of Pulaw City have been arrested, according to witnesses from Pulaw. Other sources said that the military came and arrested about three civilians who used to serve as Administrators in the former NLD government term:

“They came with Army Lorries and arrested them. Many teachers were included too. It is unknown why they were arrested. In one case, a father of a CDM teacher was grabbed because the troops could not find the teacher they wanted,” another witness told HURFOM.

Some of those arrested were accused of supporting networks for the revolutionary forces.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Inflation across all target areas has devastatingly affected civilians who cannot meet their basic needs.
2. Residents reported that they were forced to take sentry duty by the junta in Kyaik Hto, Mon State and had to pay duty fees for those absent from guarding.
3. Clashes have led to forced internal displacement in Burma as instability and tensions move people from their homes.
4. Police and junta-backed militias continue to initiate door-to-door checks and arrest those on their wanted lists.
5. Concerns have spread as the military junta begins to make decisions that would bar competing democratic parties from the next election in Burma. The military junta has been trying to change/manipulate the numbers of constituencies.
6. Motorcycles, mobile devices, and money are confiscated and extorted from civilians at checkpoints stationed by the junta deliberately along critical routes. Civilians are forced to pay excessive bribes to retrieve their possessions. However, very few were able to afford the high costs.
7. Torture remains rampant in Burma and across target areas where innocent civilians are subjected to gruelling, horrifying acts by the junta to extract information.
8. The international community, including UN bodies and ASEAN, is not responding swiftly enough to the situation in Burma, which demands urgent attention and consequences for the junta.
9. Military impunity remains deeply ingrained in the institutions representing the Tatmadaw, which only encourages the junta to continue perpetrating human rights violations.
10. Children are targeted by the military junta and deprived of basic needs, including medical attention, food, education, and the right to live safely.
11. The junta's arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention are ongoing, as are warrantless raids and indiscriminate firing into civilian areas.

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.

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