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Women's League of Burma (WLB)

For the first time in the nation's history, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Burma/Myanmar has reached nearly **1 million** people. The junta has torched **12,000 civilian** homes across the country, in what can only be viewed as the military's overarching strategy to **intentionally displace** the population, rather than a by-product of local level retaliation. The Burmese Army is actively preventing the delivery of lifesaving assistance to people affected by the conflict – **blocking roads**, destroying non-military supplies, imposing travel restrictions on international humanitarian workers and **arresting local activists** and people delivering lifesaving aid to IDP camps from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

Despite the overwhelming evidence that the Burmese Army has committed grave **crimes against humanity**, and is the root cause of the humanitarian crisis, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and ASEAN's humanitarian body (AHA), agreed to **deliver humanitarian** aid to Karenni/Kayah, Karen states, and Magwe, Sagaing and Bago regions in consultation with the work committee of the military junta. OCHA and AHA's assessment and delivery of programs will provide the junta with access to areas it has directly targeted with airstrikes and on-ground offensives. The agreement not only legitimizes the regime; it places the Burmese Army in a position to weaponize humanitarian aid.

People all over Burma/Myanmar are facing severe food insecurity with an estimated 25 million people now living under the national **poverty line**, and 6.2 million people in need of life-saving aid. The conflict, along with the impact of COVID-19 containment measures, super-charged economic instability, leading to a currency crisis, rising inflation rates and a collapsed banking system. Women have been most impacted by the economic crisis, not just experiencing significant job losses, but taking on more unpaid care and domestic work. Women are also more likely than men to **make sacrifices** to reduce the financial stress on households.

Alongside the peaceful pro-democracy movement, various armed resistance forces have emerged across the country. Some of the most effective armed resistance forces are fighting junta soldiers in an area called the Dry Zone, west of Mandalay. Not being a traditional battle ground for the junta, they have recruited, armed and trained pro-military networks to provide back-up, intelligence and local geographic knowledge. The pro-military networks are referred to widely as Pyu Saw Htee. The Pyu Saw Htee are reportedly poorly armed and have failed to take control of the region. The clashes between the two forces has unleashed a **self-sustaining cycle of violence** with retributive attacks on both sides.



Women continue to suffer from the conflict. They experience additional threats to their health and safety, not just by the Burmese Army, but an ongoing threat of gender-based violence and discrimination. Women's experience of gender-based violence often goes unheard, particularly in times of conflict – they become reduced as less important, or commonly go under-reported because of distrust in systems and narratives of shame.

Prior to the coup, justice for survivors was often limited because of quick settlements due to bribery by perpetrators and corrupt authorities. Now the entire justice system has been destroyed, and there is no form of accountability or punishment of perpetrators. Perpetrators of violence are acting with impunity, making daily life increasingly unsafe for women and children.

Women in the CDM have not been spared from **gender-based violence**, with many cases of women in the CDM and Peoples Defense Force are living in the jungle after being subjected to sexual violence. Many of these women are unable to access support and counselling because of the difficulties presented by the remoteness of their location and the security concerns that CSOs face when carrying out their work.

The complete erosion of justice mechanisms has allowed perpetrators to commit acts of sexual assault against women with absolute impunity. In early April, a Burmese Army soldier guarding a school in Za Jan Village in Taung Tha Township, Mandalay Region, **raped** a 21-year-old woman with mental health problems. Her father, a cousin and at least two women witnessed the rape. But police refused to open a case when they filed a complaint at the local police station. Family members also filed complaints with the Burmese Army, who responded by hiding the perpetrator.

Women report being sexually assaulted at their place of employment, with no avenue to make formal complaints or seek justice. WLB members report that women working in the upper Burma and local Dawei region at KTV venues are frequently subjected to sexual violence, threats and psychological violence by soldiers from the Burmese Army. Another WLB member reported that women working in the remaining garment factories are being sexually exploited by their employers.



AS WOMEN WE DARE NOT TO REPORT THE CASE TO THE POLICE. THE CHINESE MANAGERS ARE COMMITTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE SUCH AS HITTING WOMEN'S HIPS, HUGGING OUR SHOULDERS, SOMETIMES KISSING US. NOT ONLY ME BUT ALSO MOST OF THE WOMEN IN THE FACTORIES ARE FACING THIS.

An employee at the Chinese-owned Myanmar Tencent Fashion Garment textile factory in Shwepyithar township, Yangon, reported.

Arbitrary arrests and abductions of family members continues to be a common practice of the Burmese Army. Between April 30 and May 3, the Burmese Army abducted nine family members of Civil Disobedience Member (CDM), Wai Lwin Oo. Nobody has seen or heard from the family, including his **four-year-old daughter**. On April 12, 50 year old woman, Daw Soe Soe, the wife of Mandalay District NLD vice chair U Ko Ko Lay, was beaten and her **thighs slashed** by the Burmese Army before they abducted her. She died during interrogation and the Burmese Army dumped her body on the side of the road. Concerns grow for prominent NLD lawyer, Daw Ywat Nu Aung who went missing in late April. It is presumed she was arrested by the Burmese Army or kidnapped by **pro-regime militia**, who are targeting NLD supporters.

Over 100 celebrities, including model's, actresses and film makers have been arrested and illegally detained for speaking out against the Burmese Army. In April, film producer, **Ma Aeint** was sentenced to three years of jail with hard labour.

Impacts of Military Offensives and Human Rights Violations in Ethnic Areas

As the conflict continues into its fifteenth month, the situation is taking its toll on IDPs physical and mental health. There is a critical need for food and medicine and many IDPs are experiencing trauma, anxiety and depression.

In addition to the newly displaced refugees, there are over 50,000 IDPs in the **Rakhine State**, who were displaced by the 2018-20 fighting. They are experiencing significant food insecurity as restrictions on aid organisations have tightened across the country. IDPs in the Rakhine state are living in makeshift camps and monasteries and have relied on international aid relief since they were displaced. Since the coup, the food rations have significantly decreased, placing the Rohingya IDPs at serious risk of starvation.

Life in IDP camps is hard, and particularly for women who are more at risk of sexual assault, domestic violence, unwanted pregnancies and forced marriage. The need for maternal health services and products in IDP camps is critical. Women's maternal health concerns have been exacerbated by the death and/ or disappearance of health professionals and midwives. There is **inadequate clean water** and sanitation, making birthing more dangerous to mother and baby.

A recent report on the experience of IDP women across six IDP camps, found only **one woman in a leadership position**. Inadequate representation of women in leadership roles within the camps has ramifications for the broader needs of women and children in the camps. The same study found that needs specific to women, such as pads, underwear, and contraception, was not mentioned during the in-depth interviews with both men and women IDPs, it was only mentioned in key informant interviews when asked specifically about the needs of women.

The **health system** is almost non-existent in many parts of Burma/ Myanmar, with many health and medical staff in hiding, or arrested for their involvement in the CDM. Health workers in Karenni/Kayah State estimate they are reaching only thirty percent of the population in need of **medical care**, as the Burmese Army has prevented access to certain areas. COVID-19 has spread uncontrollably, with dire consequences for the people in IDP camps who find it difficult to isolate. International medical **aid is still arriving through Yangon**, where distribution is in the hands of the junta. Cross-border aid is essential for ethnic groups to access critical supplies, and yet the Thailand Government's response has been to tighten its borders.

Thousands of **farmers** have been displaced from their homes by Burmese Army airstrikes and artillery raids, making it unsafe for them to return home to tend to their crops. Naw Paw Paw, from Mutraw/Hpa-pun District, has been unable to return home since the Burmese Army started its offensive, “I have grown seasonal fruits like durian in my farm. Since being displaced by the fighting, I have lost a lot of money. It is now the durian season, but **I can't return to my farm** [for the harvest].”

The displacement of farmers has significantly disrupted essential land-preparation activities for the monsoon cropping season of **rice and maize**. This will have significant ramifications on the domestic food supplies which will further raise the price of food, which is already up by 30 percent since the coup.

CHIN STATE

Severe food shortages and increasing poverty is being felt across the country, however due to the hilly mountain terrain of the Chin State and its heavy reliance on importing goods, the people in Chin State are particularly vulnerable to **food insecurity**. Chin State is the **poorest state** in Burma/Myanmar, with 80 percent of the population experiencing food insecurity prior to the coup. The increase on transport fees and the deliberate blocking of trade routes by the junta, is having a significant impact on accessibility and the price of food in Chin State.

On May 4, the junta burned down homes in northern Chin State, while its **100 strong convoy** travelled from Hakha to Falam. Since the start of the coup, the junta has torched over 1,130 houses in Chin State, setting fire to Thantlang township 26 times. These deliberate attempts by the Burmese Army to displace civilians has resulted in **36,000 IDPs** in the Chin State, and an estimated number of 30,000 refugees in bordering towns of India.

Most of the refugees that fled to **Mizoram** and Manipur in India are from the Chin State. The Chin and Mizo community have a close bond, with a history of **intermarriage and family kinship** on both sides. The local Mizoram government has taken in the recent Chin refugees; however ongoing humanitarian assistance requires support from the central Indian Government. In 2021, the Indian Government released a statement that they could not recognize the refugees from Burma/ Myanmar and India is not a signatory of the International Refugee Convention.

KACHIN STATE

The Burmese Army increased its presence in Tan Ja and Lon Shar Yang villages in Putao Township in its efforts to control the area in northern Kachin State from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). After month-long fighting, approximately **5,000 villagers** from Sumpyi Yang, Hpert Mar, Lon Shar Yang and N'se Yang returned to their homes thinking it was safe to return. Only a fortnight after returning to their village, fighting resumed when the Burmese

Army approached Tan Ja on April 3. Another 400 IDPs from Kachin State returned to their villages in the last week of May, after being displaced by fighting between KIA and the Burmese Army in 2011. The **repatriated IDPs** are fearful of the ongoing crisis and are worried about their children's education.

A report from **Kachin Women's Association Thailand** has documented the ongoing human rights violations, including sexual assault, in Kachin State by the Burmese Army. Since November 2021, the Burmese Army has carried out five airstrikes and 13 artillery attacks on civilian areas in Kachin State, killing 10 and injuring 35 people. Indiscriminate shootings have taken the lives of 11 people, who were simply going about their daily lives.

Women human rights defenders report a drastic increase in gender based violence in Kachin State. A CSO worker in Kachin State reported, "[s]ince the coup, domestic violence has increased by about 75 percent, and sexual violence has also increased by 50 percent. **Child rape** cases are at an alarming rate." Survivors of violence no longer have access to a safe place of refuge, as they are unable to travel because of Burmese Army checkpoints.

KAREN STATE

Karen State has been one of the most affected by the military offensive of the junta. The indiscriminate airstrikes have already displaced thousands of people. **Over 170,000 people** have been displaced. Just along the Moei River in Dooplaya/Kyainseikgyi District, the number of IDPs has increased from around 4,000 in January 2022 to around 11,400 as of the first week of April 2022.

At the end of April, intense fighting broke out between the Burmese Army, Boarder Guard Force battalion (BGF) and the Karen National Liberation Army displacing over **10,000 villagers** in Karen and Mon states. After the Burmese Army and BGF displaced the villagers, they proceeded to rob and loot everything of value. More than 30 village houses were broken into, many of them shops. They trashed houses and **stole livestock and food reserves**. The heavy **monsoonal rains** made it difficult for the IDPs to find shelter, and many were left living in makeshift tents along the river banks. The rain submerged vehicles and hampered the delivery of aid, with much needed provisions, such as bags of rice, submerged by the rain.

On May 1, a BGF battalion, under the control of the Burmese Army, forcibly detained **100 civilians** from eight villages in Karen and Mon states. A witness who escaped arrest reported the Burmese Army rounded up and arrested the villagers and shot anyone who tried to escape. The BGF made similar illegal arrests in March and April, forcing villagers to carry food and ammunition.

The reality for **IDPs entering Thailand** from Karen State is different to the Thai government's formal policy to commit to assisting refugees from Burma/Myanmar. Villagers report that they were told by the Thai soldiers that gunfire was prohibited and they are not allowed to enter Thailand, forcing many back

over the border. The push-back from Thai soldiers has resulted in semi-formal displacement sites along the Burma/Myanmar side of the Moei River. Humanitarian assistance is mostly Karen-led organisations who are working together to maximize impact for IDPs.

KARENNI/KAYAH STATE

The junta is planting **landmines** in the villages they visit. In early April a tractor carrying IDPs was blown up by a landmine, **two children** were injured. Since the coup, a local CSO recorded at least 15 civilian injuries causing disability and one death due to the landmines.

The Burmese Army have increased the number of checkpoints in Karenni/Kayah State and are assaulting and arresting travelers. In late April, five people, including one woman, were **abducted** by the Burmese Army at a checkpoint in Loikaw.

WLB member reported that over a year in IDP camps has made life very hard. In Karenni/ Kayah State IDP camps, drinking water is scarce and people need to walk for hours to access water. Domestic violence, **rape and child abuse** have increased in the IDP camps, where residents struggle with trauma and other mental health issues.

SAGAING REGION

The Burmese Army increased its offensive in Kalay township in late April, displacing approximately 50,000 people. The entire population of Nat Chuang, approximately 10,000 people are displaced and in desperate need of **food and medicine**.

Over the weekend of April 23, the Burmese Army launched an offensive and torched nine villages in Sagaing Region's upper region in Wuntho Township. Three civilians died, including a woman who **burned to death**, and another woman who was shot dead in Thabyay Thar Village. The soldiers raided several villagers nearby and abducted four people to use as human shields. Four of the villages were completely burnt to the ground and over 10,000 people were displaced in the region over two days.

In the southwest of Sagaing, fighting broke out between PDF and Burmese Army soldiers near Ah Shey See and Doe Nwe villages on April 28. The Burmese Army stole as much as they could from the villagers homes before **they set fire** to more than 800 homes and two storehouses full of rice. Ten villagers who were fleeing the fighting drowned in the Nyit Tha River after a bamboo bridge they were crossing broke, casualties included a **toddler**.

SHAN STATE

Fighting between various armed forces continued during April and May in the Northern and Southern Shan State, with the northeastern part of the state most impacted by the conflict. Landmines have been laid by various armed groups in the Northern and Southern Shan State, resulting in at least **14 deaths and many injuries**, including to children, between February-April 2022. The longevity of the conflict is having a profound impact on women and **increasing levels of anxiety**.

On April 19, the Burmese Army **tortured and killed nine villagers** from Pe Yin Taung, Ywangan Township. They cut them on their hands and stomachs with knives before shooting them in the head and burning their bodies on a pile of car tires in a field. The residents of Pe Yin Taung fled their homes and are now displaced.

In a report released by SWAN, that analyzed **30 cases** of gender-based violence between February and April 2022, found nine out of the 30 cases involved sexual violence. The report also found that drug use and gambling was a factor in almost all cases.

A 50 year old woman in Kutkai was **sexually assaulted** and beaten by a Burmese Army soldier. The soldier followed the woman to her home where she was sexually groped, beaten in the head and strangled. Her nephew and younger brother heard her shouts and the soldier ran away. The woman lost her hearing from the blows to her head.

The complete erosion of the rule of law has made it impossible for women who have been subjected to sexual and gender-based violence to seek justice or support. Perpetrators are able to act with impunity, which has increased the number of cases of gender-based violence in the Shan State. WLB member reported, “[s]ince the coup, **domestic violence** has increased by about 75 percent, and sexual violence has also increased by 50 percent. Child rape cases are at an alarming rate.”

WLB member reported that since the closure of schools, there has been an increase in the number of young people getting married and falling pregnant. Pregnant women are more vulnerable during times of conflict, as they are less able to flee from violence and require higher nutrition and medical care, which is almost non-existent in IDP camps.

WLB AND MEMBERS' SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

WLB and its members continue to provide support to members of the CDM, including WHRDs, government officials, and young people involved in the Spring Revolution. WLB's support includes financial assistance for travel, accommodation, communication costs and food for both women and men who face threats to their security. WLB and its members also actively support IDPs displaced by the civil war. Support includes the provision of basic food, medicine and shelter, and dignity packs for women.

WLB continued to advocate for increased participation of women in Burma/Myanmar during the month of April and May:

- Presented at an event on the 'Federal Dream and 2008 constitution Trap', and 'When Fascism Defeat, Will the Revolution Succeed?'
- Organised an online campaign calling for the release of all political prisoners and people unjustly detained.
- Provided training in political analysis, women peace and security, federalism and gender equality.

Burmese Women's Union represented the interest of women at the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC). They are currently undertaking data collection on women and reporting on their findings every three months.

Kachin Women's Association Thailand provided mental health and psychosocial support to villagers, and survivors of gender-based violence and human rights abuses. KWAT supported IDP women with hygiene kits, nutrition and basic food support. KWAT are operating a survivor safe house and provide livelihood support to survivors of trafficking and emergency health care support to vulnerable migrants, survivors of gender-based violence, and rape.

Karenni National Women's Organization provided essentials to IDPs, including pregnant women and children. KWO set up women centers in some IDP camps where women and girls can access counselling services, menstruation management training, and early marriage training. KWO supported 200 CDM and WHRDs during the month of April, including access to safe housing and essential services.

Karen Women's Organization proudly celebrated their 37th anniversary this month. KWO continued to provide emergency support, including health care, transportation and food to women, children, and the elderly who have suffered serious injury in Karen State. KWO is also working to provide emergency support to new IDPs, including providing essentials such as food, PPE, medicine, shelter, and nutrition for pregnant women.

Kayan Women's Organization continued to supply IDP camps with food and essential items.

Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization provided support to members of the CDM and delivered awareness training for village officers.

Lahu Women's Organization supported 200 (166 women and 34 men) CDM members in the Northern Shan State and Eastern Shan State. LWO have also undertaken fundraising to support those living with difficulties because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pa-O Women's Union provided support to 2,505 IDPs in Hlo Pon, See Sai, Taunggyi, Pin Long, Nyashwe and Loikaw, including three pregnant women. PWU also collected information on human rights violations and held workshops for donors, associations and charities delivering services to IDPs.

Shan Women's Action Network regularly provided support to members of the CDM, including field health workers. SWAN continues to document human rights violations in Shan State including gender and sexual based violence and disseminate through regular briefing papers and factsheets. Moreover, SWAN runs Girl's Power radio program at SHAN Online Radio and MAP Radio FM99 raising awareness about gender equality and women's health and highlighting women's leading roles in social and political arena.

Ta'ang Women's Organisation assisted domestic violence and sexual abuse survivors, as well as those affected by the fighting. TWO provided assistance IDPs and continues to work towards human rights and women's rights.

Tavoyan Women's Union supported women political prisoners and WHRDs. They delivered transition and justice training and provided psychosocial support training and counselling. TWU supported the delivery of emergency supplies, medicine and essentials for pregnant women to IDPs across four cities of Dawei.

Women for Justice provided support to 250 (186 women and 64 men) CDM members across a broad range of professions, including education, health, forestry, telecommunications, electricity department, immigration officials, the police and members of the fire brigade. WJ supported CDMs in Khin U, Htee Chai, Tonsan and Hakhar in Sagaing region, and Falam in Chin State. WJ also conducted a IDP census in Sagaing Division and Chin State, and provided assistance to IDP camps.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the month of April and May, the junta continued to commit grave crimes against humanity, torching villages, and burning people's livelihoods to the ground.

Daily life becomes harder as each month passes. Hunger and health issues are just some of the hardships currently faced by those in IDP camps. Cases of sexual assault and gender-based violence have increased, compounding women's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Local CSOs are carrying the weight of the relief effort, risking their lives to deliver lifesaving humanitarian aid to IDPs.

The international community has failed the people of Burma/ Myanmar, with no clear plan on how to address the overwhelming humanitarian need. ASEAN's decision to deliver aid in cooperation with the junta completely undermines the efforts by CSOs, the CDM and ethnic resistance forces, who have fought hard to protect the people of Burma/ Myanmar from the violent regime. ASEAN must redesign its plan to deliver humanitarian assistance, and instead of playing into the hands of the junta, cooperate with local CSOs who have the knowledge and expertise to deliver essential aid to those that need it.

WLB calls on the international community to stand in solidarity with the people of Burma/ Myanmar, and to support the pro-democracy resistance by denying the junta the political legitimacy it desires. The international community have the power to implement targeted sanctions which would have a significant impact on the junta's ability to fund its crimes against the people.

International Community must



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



REFERRAL TO ICC
for its crimes against
humanity



**GLOBAL ARMS
EMBARGO**

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

WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA

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

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