



ON-THE-GROUND IN BURMA

A DIGITAL BRIEFER

Issue 18 | July 31, 2022

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- The Burmese junta [installed](#) Chinese camera surveillance with facial recognition capabilities in more cities.
- State Secretary Antony Blinken [urged](#) China and ASEAN to take more action against the Burmese junta.
- 400+ CSOs [urged](#) the US, Japan, and the Republic of South Korea to boycott the ADMM-Plus meeting
- The US [joined](#) Australia and New Zealand as they boycott the ADMM-Plus meeting co-chaired by Burma and Russia.
- The ICJ [rejected](#) all four of the Burmese junta’s arguments against The Gambia’s pursuit of justice for the Rohingya.
- The [executions](#) of four democracy activists by the Burmese junta was met with outrage and condemnations. Read USCB’s statement [here](#).

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hold the Junta accountable by taking tangible actions, including, but not limited to: the passage of the BURMA Act, imposing immediate targeted sanctions on Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise and the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank;
2. Providing immediate cross-border assistance directly to local civil society organizations;
3. Recognizing and engaging with the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate government of Burma instead of the illegal military junta;
4. Exerting all possible pressure through every available means, including multilateral, regional, and bilateral engagement, to ensure that the military allows humanitarian assistance in impacted areas, immediately stops offensives throughout the country, and unconditionally releases all arbitrarily detained protesters and political prisoners.

ANALYSIS

The international community's questionable relations with the Burmese junta

Since the February 1st coup, advocates and activists have urged the international community and its leaders to refrain from cooperating or associating with the Burmese junta. Such actions will only embolden the Burmese junta to continue its brutal campaign of violence, but also give the regime the legitimacy it craves. However, despite the condemnations issued by the international bodies, such as the UN and ASEAN, we continue to see some level of cooperation with the junta leadership. ASEAN and the UN chose to distribute life-saving aid through the junta instead of working with local CSOs. The Burmese junta also maintained its co-chair position for the ADMM Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism. Instead of cutting off the junta, international bodies are giving it a life-line.

Latest Update



2,145
Killed



14,962
Arrested



11,865
Detained



4
Executed



1 million+
Estimated **Total** of IDPs
in Burma



1 million+
Estimated **Total** of refugees
Displaced in Neighboring Countries

“

Russia and the Myanmar military regime have consistently used their co-chairmanship... to propagandize and justify the atrocities they are continuing to commit against innocent people, and to imply support for these atrocities by the ADMM Plus and its members.

*U.S. Department of Defense spokesperson
Lt Col Martin Meiners*

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The recent ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) in Moscow highlights the Burmese junta's participation in international organizations. Russia and the Burmese junta hosted the meeting, using their positions as chairs of the Experts' Working Group on Counter-Terrorism to increase their cooperation, label their opponents as terrorists, and limit opposing voices. The United States, Australia, and New Zealand [boycotted](#) the meeting in response. However, the junta still maintains their legitimacy in numerous international organizations to varying degrees, including in the United Nations and ASEAN. Other organizations provide good examples of how the junta can be isolated from international cooperation.



Burma's Minister of Defense, General Mya Tun Oo, shakes hands with a Vietnamese military officer during the 16th ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting at the Ministry of National Defense in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, June 2022.

Photo cred: EPA-EFE/KITH SEREY via Myanmar Now

The organization responsible for the recent defense ministers' meeting, ASEAN, is [complicit in legitimizing](#) the junta in Burma. ASEAN created the [Five-Point Consensus](#) as a reaction to the coup, which focuses on ceasing violence and opening dialogue between parties. The junta rejected the consensus only days after endorsing it, [announcing](#) that they would consider the plan only

when the country "returned to stability." The consensus is not only dead in the water, but serves primarily to excuse the inaction of ASEAN nations and their allies. The European Union, Australia, United States, and United Kingdom use ASEAN's attempts as an excuse for not taking action against the junta. While some nations in ASEAN, such as [Singapore](#) and [Malaysia](#), criticize the junta and their lack of cooperation with the five-point consensus, Cambodia as chair continues to promote cooperation.

ASEAN, along with the United Nations, receives criticism for cooperation with the junta on [aid distribution](#) to the country. Both worked with the regime on aid assessments, or choosing how to distribute aid across the country. Choosing to go through the junta instead of local organizations to distribute the aid not only gives legitimacy to the junta but provides them control of who can access desperately needed aid. Both the [National Unity Government](#) and civil society organizations condemned the plans of the United Nations and ASEAN.



Food supplies from aid organizations and private donors are destroyed by the Burmese military en route to impacted communities in Karenni state.

Photo cred: Anonymous

This behavior contradicted other positive UN efforts to isolate and expose the junta. Last December, the UN [rejected the junta's application](#) to be accepted as the legitimate government of Burma. More recently, Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews [released a report](#) on the dismal state of children's rights in Burma. He stated that "The junta's relentless attacks on children underscore the generals' depravity and willingness to inflict immense suffering on innocent victims in its attempt to subjugate the people of Myanmar" and called for actions against the regime. The United Nations, and other associated international organizations, prove that the junta cannot be a trustworthy or ethical partner.



*Child injured from a slingshot fired by Burmese soldiers during an anti-coup demonstration in Mandalay, Burma.
Photo cred: ABC News*

It is not impossible for large international organizations to wholly cease association with the military. On the contrary, some large organizations [cut off association](#) with the junta completely. The International Monetary Fund stopped engagement with the junta because they lack international recognition and refuse to be transparent with use of funds provided to Burma before the coup. The withdrawal of the IMF [exposed the junta's](#)

[mismanagement of the economy](#) and showed the power of international organizations to weaken the junta by removing recognition.



*Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen shook hands with Min Aung Hlaing during a meeting in Naypyitaw.
Photo cred: AP*

The junta is not fully isolated and continues association with international organizations, such as ASEAN and the UN. Despite excuses to the contrary, this is not a productive path to peace. Cooperation leads to misuse of funds and continued legitimacy of a repressive regime. The IMF demonstrated a proper reaction to the coup when they chose to cut off association with the regime because of its lack of recognition and monetary transparency. The UN's rejection of the junta's request to be recognized as the government of Burma and efforts to speak out against the military's human rights abuses are more appropriate responses to the ongoing violence post-coup. The recent withdrawal of ADMM-Plus members from the meeting in Moscow hopefully provides a glimpse of a future where participation of the junta in international organizations is fully rejected.

VOICE OF A KAREN

Interview provided by the Karen Human Rights Group

On March 16th, 2022, Ta Mla fled his village with ten other families to a refugee camp in Thailand. However, due to the close proximity of the Burmese military, more families from his village followed soon after. The entire village, about 50 households, is now at the refugee camp.

Ta Mla fled before there was armed conflict, but the concerns of the fighting spread to his village forced the villagers to flee. When Ta Mla fled, he moved with the other families from place to place seeking safety from violent attacks. Despite fleeing the armed conflict near their homes, they still feared being caught in the crossfires of more fighting and mortar shells while traveling on foot.



Karen villagers crossed the Thai-Burma border into Mae Hong Son province, Thailand, while fleeing the Burmese military's air attacks.

Photo Cred: EPA via Mizzima

Once in Thailand, Thai soldiers questioned Ta Mla and the villagers. The Thai soldiers allowed the villagers to stay and told them that Thai authorities would take care of them. After a few days at the refugee camp, Ta Mla was worried that no one would come to help or provide support

with medicine and food. Conditions in the camp were difficult for the villagers and despite their location, they could still hear the fighting happening in Burma. Luckily, fellow Karen from abroad were able to provide some funds and support for the villagers. A gesture that Ta Mla and the other villagers are very thankful for.

Despite the initial support, Ta Mla shared that it is enough for now. Since he is unsure how long everyone will be here, there will be a need for more support in the near future. Food and medicine are important to survive. There are many children, elderly, and pregnant women that are at risk of becoming sick. Many at the refugee camp already have malaria. With the heavy rains, it is difficult to access clean water. The water becomes dirty when it rains. There are also not enough tarpaulins to build adequate shelters or enough clothes and blankets to stay warm in the cooler weather.

Even though Ta Mla cannot do much, he tries to look after the people in the camp and prevents others from returning to their village since it is dangerous now. Once it is safe enough to go back to their village, everyone will return home. Even though they are able to stay in Thailand, it is not their home or their country. They do not want to stay here. Until the day they are able to go home arrives, Ta Mla implores the international community for help:

“We are humans too. I don’t want them to leave us behind.”

**Name changed to protect their identity*

AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA

CHIN

The UNHCR [reported](#) that an additional 726 residents of Chin State fled to Mizoram and Manipur, India, bringing the total number of refugees in that area to 41,000. On July 1, [airstrikes](#) on Chat village, Mindat township, killed four residents and destroyed a church and a school. On July 3, everyone from two villages in [Falam township](#) fled and a dead body was found as the junta convoy moved along the Hakha-Falam-Kalay highway. Even those with disabilities are unsafe; junta attacks [killed](#) a deaf woman in Valung village and a paralysed man in Hlanzawl village.. On July 11, a Baptist church was vandalized in Ramthlo village, Falam township. On July 13, junta [blockades](#) of the Paletwa-Matupi, Matupi-Mindat, and Mindat-Kyaukhtu roads almost completely deprived residents of Matupi and Mindat townships of rice amidst price increases on many foods. On July 14, junta soldiers committed widespread [arson](#) in Chunchung village, Hakha township, as the convoy arrived.

KACHIN

Since July 10, junta troops have continuously attacked two Kachin Independence Army (KIA) bases in [Waingmaw Township](#). The junta employed heavy artillery during the day and airstrikes in the evenings. Both sides suffered heavy casualties although figures are not available. The junta-backed People's Militia Force (PMF) intimidated residents in Waingmaw Township to accept its [gold mining operations](#) despite opposition from the majority of Kachin people. On the weekend of July 16, clashes between KIA and regime troops broke out in [Hpakant](#), with the junta forces launching multiple airstrikes to allow trapped soldiers to escape. Locals sheltered in churches and monasteries as they feared further clashes. On the following Monday, July 18, junta forces and allied Shadu Zup militia attacked KIA base in [Tanai](#), near gold mining projects run by the Shadu Zup militia. The combined troops came in two army trucks and overwhelmed KIA with firepower. The KIA lost two soldiers and had to abandon the base. Twelve families from [IDP camps in Bhamo](#) are returning to their villages while another 14 families plan to return.

KARENNI

In [Demawso township](#), construction started on July 2 on a clinic to serve around 1,000 displaced residents at their camp, with additional aid requested from donors. On July 8, a [Free Burma Ranger](#), 19 year old Shay Reh, was killed in a mortar strike while helping evacuate wounded civilians. Fighting in [Loikaw township](#) on the same day killed a civilian while the Shwe Nyaung Pin Social Volunteer Team evacuated around 80 residents and escorted them through junta checkpoints. The [Kayah State Teachers' Union](#) has now distributed in sum \$130k to 2,798 CDM education workers, able to reach almost all of those living in Loikaw, Demawso, Hpruso, Maese, Hpasoung, Bawlakhe, Shardaw and Pekong townships. On July 25 CDM nurses opened applications to the [Federal Nursing University](#) for the 2022-2023 year, giving priority to IDP youths for the 100 spots for new students.

MON

From July 15 to 18, [the military junta burned down at least 10 civilian houses](#) in Tha Yet Chaung Township. From that township alone, about 7,000 villagers have fled. In Thayet Chaung Township, the military junta murdered [five villagers accused](#) of being People's Defense Force (PDF) supporters following the invasion of the village. The Burmese military shot Ko Paing Paing, 21, to death after abducting him and two other young men on July 9 in Wei-Kyun-Mytothit Ward. [The execution of four victims](#) by the junta in Yay Township prompted a counterattack by a local force that killed one junta soldier. On July 22, the [collapse of a boundary wall for a school](#) killed five and hospitalized one in Mawlamyine, the capital of Mon State. Eighteen houses and a large portion of land forcibly taken from Nyaung Kone village in Mudon Township is expected to be developed into [an airport](#).

KAREN

On July 4, the junta launched [airstrikes on Arakan Army's](#) camps in Karen State despite an informal November 2020 ceasefire. The two fighter jets destroyed a hospital, clinic, sewing factory, and other buildings and briefly entered Thailand's airspace. On July 7, the body of [NLD MP Kyaw Myo Min](#) was found in Hpa-An township, tied up and buried in a shallow grave. He became MP in 2011 and served as chairman of the Belin branch of the NLD Party. Two other NLD members were also found dead nearby. On July 13, the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO) and Palaw Township People's Defense Force staged a [joint ambush](#) on the junta's unit in Tanintharyi Region. However, the junta received a tip before the ambush and killed three resistance members in the counterattack. In [Hpa-an Prison](#), political detainees faced injuries by slingshots, beatings, and torture when they did not accept relocation to a different area. The prisoners face the denial of food, family visits and medical treatment; their lack of clean water causes skin rashes.

SHAN

On July 1, regime troops and the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) [clashed](#) in northern Shan State after the junta ordered the SSPP to abandon its camps. On July 4, an intense clash in [Pekon](#) Township resulted in the death of more than 40 junta troops and 11 PDF fighters. Resistance forces attempted to raid the regime's outposts when junta soldiers fired heavy artillery strikes. On July 13, the junta detained Kaung Thaik Soe, the founder of a [private online school](#) affiliated with the NUG, and two other teachers in Aungban, southern Shan State, bringing the total number of teachers arrested in other states and regions to at least 30. Since July 18, about 50 junta soldiers control the [Holy Mother of God Cathedral](#) in Moebye in southern Shan State and remain stationed there. Resistance forces claim that the junta uses churches to protect themselves from attacks. Civilians fleeing armed conflict in [Kyaukme Township](#), northern Shan State need emergency support due to inadequate earnings and work disruptions in rice. About 45 people shelter in schools in Mong Ting village.

RAKHINE

Over the last two months, [landmines](#) have killed and injured several in Rakhine as tensions between the Arakan Army and the Burmese military increase. On July 8, three Rohingya youths from Paung Toke village and a young man from Kyauktaw township were injured from a landmine near the Burmese military's light infantry battalions 377 and 378. A 14-year-old boy was killed by a landmine near Ann township on July 9. His family attempted to retrieve his body, but discovered another two more landmines. It was confirmed that the 66th division planted the landmines in the area and the family was warned from retrieving the boy's body. [Burmese troops](#) are entering villages in Maungdaw to search homes and arrest civilians. On July 20, four villagers, including a village administrator, were arrested during a pre-dawn raid. The next day, villagers fled Thinbaw Hla village when junta forces appeared to forcefully search homes.

CENTRAL BURMA

By June 29, at least 20,000 villagers around [Letpadaung](#) fled because of conflict around the mine site. Monywa Strike Committee [identified](#) a transgender CDM prisoner abused by a prison officer at Monywa Prison, which appears to be part of a broader trend across Burma. In Tabayin township, junta airstrikes and helicopter raids started July 2, [forcing](#) around 5,000 villagers to flee as buildings were destroyed. In Yangon, around 2,000 workers started a [strike](#) over their basic rights in Zaykabar Industrial Park's JW factory. A car struck a protest group in Hlaing township [commemorating](#) the 1962 explosion of the Rnagoon University Student Union. On July 12, junta and Pyu Saw Htee soldiers used around 40 residents of [Kantbalu township](#) in Sagaing as human shields while defusing a bomb set by a local PDF. On July 18, junta airstrikes damaged villages in Khin-U and Ye-U townships in Sagaing, hitting multiple [religious buildings](#).