



MYANMAR: ESCALATION OF CONFLICT IN RAKHINE AND SOUTHERN CHIN

Flash Update

As of 30 September 2022

Highlights

- Heavy fighting between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and the Arakan Army (AA) has continued across Rakhine and southern Chin.
- As of 27 September, more than 17,400 people have been newly displaced since August, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from past and present AA-MAF fighting to more than 91,000, according to UN latest figures.
- Particularly, intense fighting was reported in Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Maungdaw townships in Rakhine and Paletwa township in southern Chin.
- Key roads and waterways remain blocked in northern Rakhine, restricting the movement of civilians and preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching people in need.
- Most of the humanitarian response in Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon townships has been suspended since 15 September after the de facto authorities imposed restrictions on the UN and INGOs delivering assistance to these key six townships until further notice, causing shortages in food, shelter and other relief items.
- Delays are being observed on the key transportation route between Yangon and Sittwe, the state capital, which will contribute to rising commodity prices and impact on the movement of relief items.
- Safe, unimpeded access and additional funding are urgently needed to address expected shortages in contingency supplies, especially for WASH, food, shelter, NFIs and health.
- Advocacy efforts are underway at the Rakhine state level to negotiate the lifting of the new restrictions on humanitarian activities.

Situation Overview:

Heavy fighting, including airstrikes, use of landmines and mortar shelling between the MAF and the AA, has continued to escalate in Rakhine and southern Chin, resulting in further civilian casualties, destruction of properties and displacement. Intense armed clashes were reported in Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Maungdaw townships in Rakhine and Paletwa township in southern Chin over the past week.

As of 27 September, more than 17,400 people have been newly displaced since August, bringing the total number of IDPs from past and present AA-MAF fighting in these areas to more than 91,000, according to UN latest figures. This is in addition to the 137,000 mostly Rohingya IDPs who were displaced during the 2012 inter-communal conflict.

The majority of the new AA-MAF conflict IDPs have sought shelter in pre-existing displacement sites in urban areas. The dynamics of displacement and return have been very fluid; some IDPs have returned to their villages to resume livelihood activities, while others continued to move from one location to another seeking safety from clashes. However, according to various sources, the de facto authorities have reportedly been pushing IDPs sheltering mainly in Ann, Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun and Paletwa townships, to return to their places of origin before October this year when they would be removed from the assistance lists and the sites would be closed. These returns, if implemented amid continued fighting across the state, raise concerns about IDP safety and security. Meanwhile advocacy efforts continue with the

Rakhine and Chin de facto authorities on the importance of voluntary return, as well as for IDPs to be allowed to remain in the existing displacement sites and receive humanitarian assistance, should they prefer that option.

As fighting has intensified, the military presence has drastically increased, and civilians continued to be subjected to indiscriminate attacks, raids and searches in their villages, and arbitrary arrest. Internet and telecommunication services were cut for several hours in Minbya township and in some parts of Buthidaung township in northern Rakhine when clashes intensified. The road between Maungdaw and Ah Ngu Maw remains blocked, while the road between Maungdaw and Buthidaung is open. The shutdown of all public transport by the MAF has affected the free movement of civilians between the townships in northern Rakhine and in the capital, Sittwe. The transportation of medical supplies and food into Paletwa has been restricted. These measures, combined with the installation of new checkpoints across the state and tightened scrutiny, including checks on mobile phones and laptops, have limited people's movement and obstructed the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile, UN and INGO staff movement continues to be possible almost on a daily basis between northern Rakhine and Sittwe after informing relevant actors.

Local and international humanitarian partners have been providing critical assistance to affected and displaced people since the resumption of clashes, but access obstacles remain a major impediment to reaching people in need. Of particular concern is the announcement by the de facto authorities on 15 September, prohibiting the UN and INGOs from accessing six key townships - Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U, Minbya, and Myebon - until further notice. This has caused shortages in food, shelter and other relief items especially in the six restricted townships.

Travel authorization requests from the UN and INGOs to the other 11 townships in Rakhine continue to be processed for October but partners are facing huge delays in obtaining the approvals, and food and nutrition activities, in particular, continue to face problems even in these townships. However, from October onwards, even staff movement may no longer be possible as the monthly travel authorizations are not being renewed for the UN and INGOs operating in the six restricted townships. Advocacy efforts are ongoing to find ways forward. In parallel, since May, the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) has been pushing to introduce a parallel registration and travel notification system for humanitarian actors in Rakhine and this has resulted in additional interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities.

Furthermore, partners also report that pre-positioning of stocks has consequently become a concern with supplies mostly being held in Sittwe township where there is warehouse capacity because of security concerns in other townships. There are now no available pre-positioned stocks in southern Rakhine or in Paletwa township. Each cluster only has remaining stocks for roughly 100 to 300 households in Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon, Kyauktaw, and Sittwe townships.

Humanitarian needs and response:

Despite the surge in displacement and growing needs, the increased security measures and new access constraints have drastically impeded humanitarian operations, confining responses to certain townships within the State.

Rakhine:

- In Kyauktaw, partners have been providing emergency relief items, including shelter kits, to newly displaced families at existing displacement sites. However, the transportation of relief items from Sittwe to Kyauktaw remains challenging, especially through the Kyauktan checkpoint in Sittwe.
- Since 1 September, partners have managed to provide NFI support to more than 700 households in 3 townships (Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw and Sittwe). More than 200 newly displaced families were also supported with the hygiene kits in Mrauk-U.

- In Sittwe, one humanitarian partner managed to distribute NFIs items to 15 newly arrived displaced households in September.

Paletwa township, Chin:

- Access to IDPs in Paletwa township has been challenging but local partners are trying to monitor the needs of the population. Meanwhile, initial feedback indicates that the main gaps are food, NFIs, shelter and dignity kits.

Gaps and challenges:

- Humanitarian partners are unable to implement activities in 6 out of the 17 townships in Rakhine since the imposition of the restrictions on 15 September. Access to Paletwa township in Chin also remains difficult. While access remains possible to the remaining 11 townships in Rakhine, partners are facing significant challenges in delivering assistance to affected and displaced people in a timely and sustained manner due to delays in getting through checkpoints (on average wait times are 3-4 hours daily) and certain items being restricted.
- Food has become a major issue for all IDPs from both the past and present AA-MAF conflict who are sheltering in the six restricted townships, as well as those newly displaced in the existing displacement sites.
- Suppliers are hesitant to transport relief items between Sittwe and other townships due to excessive checks and tight security measures on the checkpoints. Challenges in transporting relief items between Yangon and Sittwe are also expected to increase and cause more problems for delivery.
- Funding for the humanitarian response is urgently required to address expected shortages in contingency supplies, especially for food, shelter, water and sanitation, health and other relief items.
- Explosive ordnance risks remain a critical concern since the resumption of the clashes. This will require concerted efforts and funds to create awareness through explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) activities for the displaced population, host communities and humanitarian responders.

*** Information in this update is based on inputs from humanitarian partners in central and northern Rakhine (MIAG)*

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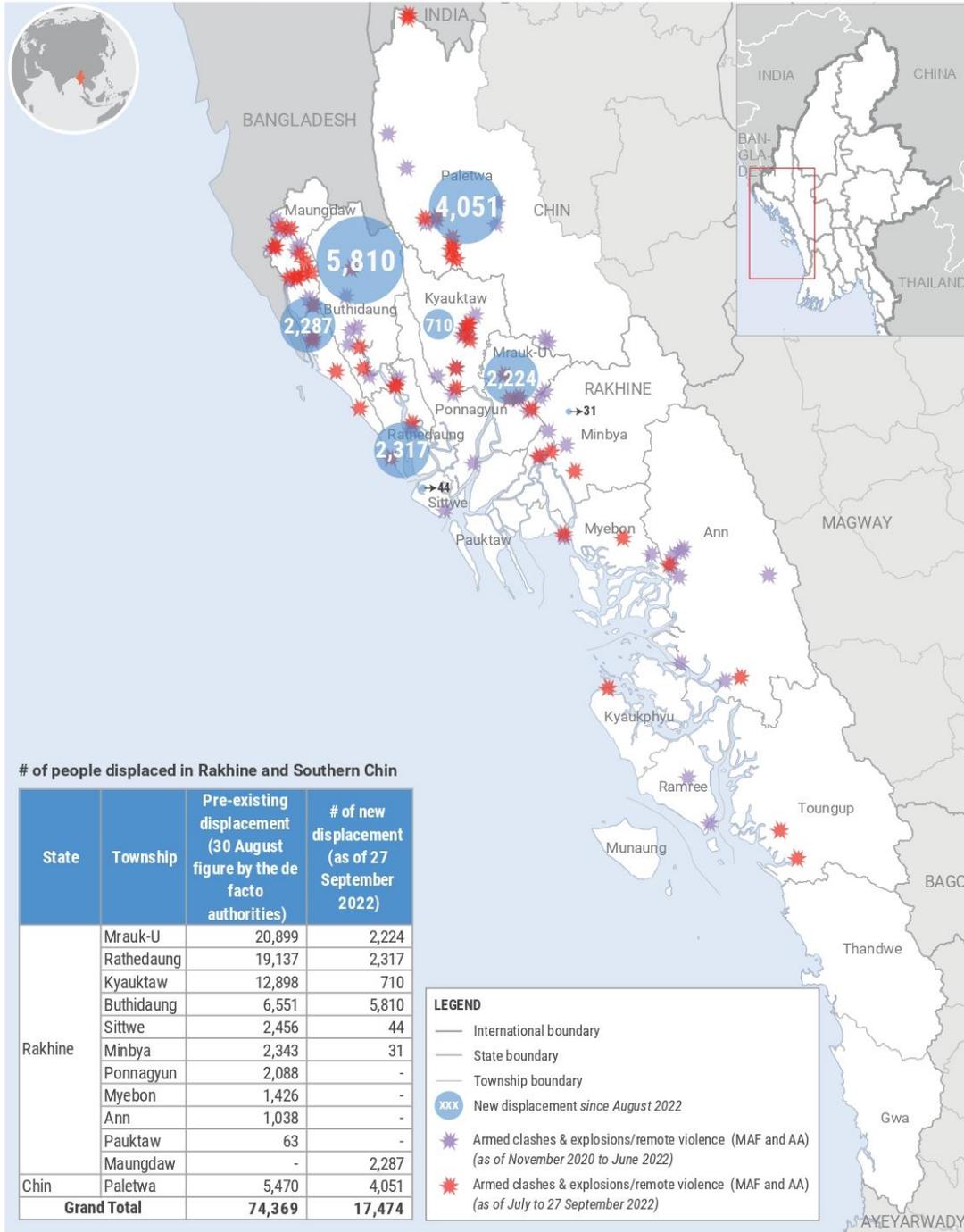


MYANMAR

Rakhine & Southern Chin (Paletwa township) displacement update

OCHA

As of 27 September 2022



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