



# ON-THE-GROUND IN BURMA

A DIGITAL BRIEFER

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## MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- Director of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar [announced](#) that Facebook provided millions of items to support accusations of genocide and war crimes against the Burmese junta.
- The Burma Special Advisory Council [demanded](#) that the UNGA recognize the current NUG-appointed representative, Kyaw Moe Tun.
- Since the attempted coup, the Australian government [spent](#) \$2.5 million of taxpayer funds on luxury accommodations linked to the Burmese junta.
- The UN [called](#) on the international community to support human rights defenders in Burma.
- APHR [launched](#) a press conference on the results from the international inquiry investigation on the global response to the crisis in Burma.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hold the junta accountable by taking tangible action, including, but not limited to: the passage of the BURMA Act, immediate targeted sanctions on Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise and the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank;
2. Provide immediate cross-border assistance directly to local civil society organizations;
3. Recognize and engage with the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate government of Burma instead of the illegal military junta;
4. Exert 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 need for the BURMA Act in wake of increasing internal strife, growing ties to Russia, and the upcoming election.

It has been five months since the BURMA Act was passed in the House of Representatives. Despite this successful passage, the bill has remained stall in the U.S. Senate. Unfortunately, the people of BURMA cannot wait. Reports of instability and violence continue to pour out of the country. There have been 14,000+ attacks and battles, 1+ million internally displaced persons, 2,200+ civilians murdered, 15,000+ arrested, and 12,500+ detained. As the Burmese junta continues to commit crimes against humanity, war crimes, human rights violations, and genocide with impunity, these numbers will only rise. The people of Burma have called on the international community for assistance, justice, and accountability. The U.S. government must take the next step of passing the BURMA Act.

## BURMA ACT Provisions:



\$220 Million  
Humanitarian Aid



Assistance to those  
securing release of  
political prisoners



\$50 Million  
Democracy Assistance



Prohibit Gem  
Imports



Authorizes special  
coordinator for Burmese  
Democracy at US State Dept



Sanction  
MOGE

“

As the death toll continues to rise, the United States must not be indifferent to Burma's fate. Horrible atrocities have been committed against minority groups, including the Rohingya, which has led more than one million to flee as refugees.

*U.S. Senator Cardin on the need to pass the BURMA ACT*

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It has been five months since the BURMA Act was [passed](#) in the House of Representatives, but the bill has since completely stalled in the Senate. Once again, the people of Burma need bipartisan support to get the help they need. The situation is still extremely dire. According to ALTSEAN-Burma, there have been at least 14,461 [battles and attacks](#), internally displacing a staggering 1,019,900 people as of August. The military has murdered at least 2,229 civilians and arrested another 15,294.

Armed conflict is only ramping up, and is starting to reach places previously untouched by war. In July, ten days of artillery shelling between the military and the Karen National Liberation Army [forced](#) over 4,000 villagers to flee in Mon State, which was relatively peaceful until the last few months. Resistance forces currently [control](#) 52% of the country and are contesting another 23%, but the conflict is still nowhere close to ending anytime soon.



*IDPs along the Salween River in Karen state in March 2021  
Photo Cred: Karen News*

In the territories they do control, the junta is organizing a police state. They have [restricted](#) social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and [ordered](#) long-distance buses to monitor passengers. As a last-resort in a few places, the junta has often turned to completely

[shutting off](#) the internet or imposing taxes that increase internet prices beyond what many can afford. These new restrictions are increasing their hold by suppressing civilian opposition but are egregiously violating basic rights such as freedom of speech, access to information, and privacy.



*After a junta military airstrike targeted a middle school in Let Yet Kone village, wreckage covered the school's floor and 13 people, including 7 children, were killed.  
Photo cred: AP via The Guardian*

These issues in Burma are surprisingly similar to the recent Russian-Ukrainian War. Both are international crises that have killed thousands, displaced millions, and have turned their respective countries into war zones. Both are an opportunity for the United States to uphold democracy and its principles. Yet, only one has gotten significant attention. Ukraine has [received](#) \$12.9 billion in defense funding from the United States alone since the war started while Burma has [received](#) comparatively little, with only surface-level sanctions and \$434 million of aid. The BURMA Act aims to change this by [providing](#) \$470.5 million to address the attempted coup in Burma, of which \$220.5 million would be used for humanitarian aid and \$50 million would be used to support democracy activists and free media.

In fact, Russia has close ties to the junta with both supporting each other's atrocities. The junta has made Burma one of only a few countries to not

side with Ukraine, [interpreting](#) the war as Russia working to "consolidate its sovereignty." Burma has recently [experienced](#) severe gas shortages, with prices up 350% since the coup. After Europe sanctioned Russian oil exports, the junta is now importing gas to address these shortages, directly funding war on the other side of the planet in Ukraine while using this gas for their own war. Russia is also one of the Burmese military's biggest arms suppliers. The junta has [bought](#) \$807 million in firearms, unmanned aerial vehicles, and helicopters from 2010 to 2019. This year, Russia is [delivering](#) six new jet fighters to the Burmese military as part of a \$204 million contract. The military's ties to Russia have not at all been a new development. Rather, it is only becoming more clear that they are partners in crime in destroying democracy. Russia's war with Ukraine has demonstrated that the American people are clearly opposed to injustice not only within their country but outside of it too. If we are to stick to this belief, we clearly need to support Burma.



PDF seized landmines from the Burmese military in Yinmabin Township, Sagaing region in August 2022. Photo cred: Northern Yamar PDF via Myanmar Now

With Burma's next election coming up soon in 2023, the military is about to take another step in strengthening their control over the country. The

election has already been pushed back two years because of the junta's emergency rule, but this is set to expire on February 1st. It should then be within six months of this date, according to the constitution. However, military chief Min Aung Hlaing has already [hinted](#) this could be illegally delayed.

Regardless, it is clear this election will not be free or fair, as the junta is already preparing to subvert it. They have indicated that they are [planning](#) to switch from a first-past-the-post voting system (the same as the US) to proportional representation, which benefits the military's proxy parties and gives Min Aung Hlaing a high chance of becoming the country's next president. Ten major government officials, including ministers, were [replaced](#) with military loyalists. If both of those were not enough, the military's Union Election Commission is [requiring](#) approval for political parties to meet with international organizations. This effectively controls international relations, further restricting options for parties opposed to the military. Against such insurmountable odds, Burmese media and democracy activists need the BURMA Act's \$50 million of support.

Reaching a peaceful, democratic Burma is a crisis requiring international attention and cooperation. As a world leader, the United States must set an example for others. The BURMA Act will be a major step forward in saving the so far neglected people of Burma with hopefully many more to follow. Passing the bill now will provide direct aid to civilians on the ground and provide funding to take down the junta, a clear associate of Russia's and an usurper of freedom.

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES ON THE GROUND

*Interview with Naw Hser Hser of the Women's League of Burma*

In an interview with USCB, Naw Hser Hser of the Women's League of Burma (WLB) discusses the situation on the ground, WLB's (and other women's groups) current work, and what the international community can do moving forward.

For decades the military has systematically used sexual violence as a weapon of war. WLB documented 104 women who were raped by the junta between 2010 – 2014 and 47 cases were brutal gang rapes. In 2018, the UN Secretary-General report found the junta to be a “widespread threat and use of sexual violence were integral to their strategy, humiliating, terrorizing and collectively punishing the Rohingya community.”

WLB supports women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and serves IDPs, one of the fastest growing impacted communities in Burma. WLB has supported 37,318+ IDPs in conflict zones and 1,660+ CDM protesters that fled the Burmese junta with basic needs. Fortunately, they are still able to work on and operate in areas of its member organizations since the attempted coup. Women's groups are witnessing the complete and total lack of rule of law in Burma.

The military junta continues to perpetrate crimes against women with impunity. Because the courts have been taken over by the military junta, all possibilities for justice are impossible. There cannot be true and meaningful justice under the Burma Army. Women's groups, particularly WLB member organizations, have continued to advocate for the restoration of the democratically elected government and an end to the human rights violations. In the midst of COVID-19 and the attempted coup, women's organizations are trying their best to provide different forms of relief such

as humanitarian aid, hygiene kits, menstrual care items, food, shelter, and medicine.



*Karenni women IDPs fleeing the Burmese military in Karenni state.*

*Photo cred: KnHRG*

Conflict-related sexual violence is becoming a greater threat as the military junta increases their presence. Civilian areas are directly targeted, such as IDP camps, schools, and health centers. Women have little to no access to protection when the military junta violates their rights. Some cases include when a 62-year-old woman from Kutkai Township, Shan state was raped at her home in November 2021. A few days later, the mother of a one-month-old child was repeatedly raped by junta soldiers in front of her husband at gunpoint in Aklui village, Tedim Township in Chin State. The same evening, the victim's 30-year-old sister-in-law, who was seven months pregnant, was also raped by the junta troops.

WHRDs in the ethnic areas **face grievous risk** where armed conflicts wreak havoc within the context of the pandemic. Like their sisters in urban areas, they see **increased curtailment of civil liberty rights and violence inflicted on them.**

The challenges faced by women amid the coup are largely safety and security. The Burma Army is acting with impunity as they arrest, detain, torture, and kill anyone who challenges their authority. Women are not safe in military custody. Gender-specific violence is a serious threat to WHRDs on the ground.

As nationwide protests continue, women are organizing but facing challenges, including increasing surveillance by the regime. The 2008 Constitution, which grants the military junta complete control over military justice, makes it difficult for survivors to file threats or complaints.



*In Mandalay, women protesters rally against the Burmese junta in July, 2021.*

*Photo cred: AFP via BNI*

Women are adjusting by refusing to accept the dictatorship as the norm. The people of the country overwhelmingly reject the military junta and everything it stands for. This is not a future that past generations fought for, and it is not one that the present generation will accept. Civilians are making advocacy calls for a global arms

embargo and accountability through international legal mechanisms. They are also calling for greater protection of women and young girls.

While WLB's priorities are focused on documentation efforts to use as evidence to hold the junta accountable for their vast crimes against humanity, it is committed to seeing the military junta and Generals tried at the International Criminal Court. The international community must:

- facilitate immediate humanitarian assistance, including cross-border aid to internally displaced people across the country,
- institute a comprehensive global arms embargo,
- impose targeted sanctions,
- establish immediate and regular monitoring and evaluation of the situation, refer military junta to the International Criminal Court or another international tribunal to hold the military junta to account for the atrocities and violations of international law that it has committed and is continuing to commit,
- support CDM and Peaceful protestors and HRD/WRDs,
- ASEAN should/must take stronger actions on the military junta,
- engage immediately with the National Unity Consultative Council and the National Unity Government.

## AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA

### CHIN

Earlier in the month, due to rising tensions in southern Chin State, armed clashes were expected between resistance forces and the military, causing around [1,000](#) to evacuate. Displaced refugees in southern Chin State are now in dire need of materials, but aid workers are limited due to the fighting in the region. This year, during the rainy season, many have been [struck by malaria](#) – there have been more cases in this year’s rainy season than there have been for all of 2020. An increasing number of “struggling” military soldiers have [also defected](#) during clashes in the South, though resistance forces have stated that these soldiers would be welcomed with open arms. The isolation of the regime and its failure to gain ground have been cited as the reasons for increased abandonment.

### KACHIN

On Sept 8, Myo Hla People’s Defense Force clashed with 80 junta soldiers. On the same day, the junta [burned down](#) homes and a school in Tharyar Kon village in Shwegu Township, claiming that resistance fighters were at the school. On Sept 14, about 180 junta soldiers [raided](#) the Lon Khin village where resistance fighters were staying, abducting two civilians and burning a grocery shop and two vehicles. On Sept 22, the Kachin People’s Defense Force attacked about 100 junta soldiers who were crossing a river. In response, the regime forces [fired artillery](#), hitting the village of Moe Sit. Four civilians were injured and a nine-year-old boy was killed. U Myo Myo Kyaw, an NLD member of Kachin State parliament, [was killed](#) at a military interrogation center at the Northern Command in Myitkyina. He was arrested with an anti-coup protest leader at the Mile 21 checkpoint on Aug 24. The date of his death is unknown, and his family did not receive his body.

### KARENNI

Clashes between the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force and the military at the Shan-Karenni Border resulted in the launch of several artillery shells and airstrikes and roughly [65 deaths](#) from both sides. These clashes also spilled into the town of Moebye, and intense shelling during the battle [killed a child](#), injured three others, and destroyed multiple homes. Since Sep 13, phone lines, cellular services, and electricity have been cut off, and civilians were urged to leave the area. Anti-regime groups also [fired a shell](#) at a Burma Army base in response to their near daily shellings of residential neighborhoods in Demoso Township. Other fighting [resulted](#) in the deaths of two civilians and destruction of 30 houses by military soldiers. The burnt remains of one person were found. Conditions in Karenni IDP camps are extremely poor. An undisclosed volunteer reported their experience traveling to an IDP camp as harrowing, due to the lack of food, water, and dangerous traveling conditions.

### MON

Due to the ongoing armed conflict and human rights violations throughout the country, [parents fear](#) sending their children to attend universities in Yangon, Mandalay, and Magway. A local junta-backed militia and village administrators are [conducting](#) nightly searches in Ka Mar Mole village in Chaung Zone Township. Villagers worry about their safety and the possibility of being arrested for unfounded reasons or having their belongings looted. The Burmese junta has also set up checkpoints and subject individuals to rigorous security checks. As armed resistance in southern Ye Township increases, the Burmese military has tightened security in response. On Sept 23 in Ka Log village, a villager was [shot and killed](#) by the Burmese military. They justified the killing as a response to a breach in martial law.

## KAREN

On Sept 5th, the junta carried out multiple attacks along the strategic Myawaddy-Waw Lay Road in [Myawaddy Township](#), firing multiple artillery strikes day and night. Two days later, the junta fired 20 rounds of heavy artillery in the afternoon and another 40 rounds at night. On Sept 20th, KNU and NUG joint forces gained control of a junta base in [Kawkareik Township](#). This attack killed seven junta soldiers and injured two. Resistance forces seized multiple weapons such as rocket launchers, long-range mortar, a machine gun, and ammunition. On Sept 26th, joint troops from the KNLA and Special Operation Force attacked a pagoda in [Kyainseikgyi Township](#) where the junta's Infantry Battalion 283 was stationed. This attack killed 13 regime soldiers, including a deputy battalion commander while 17 soldiers fled the raid. The junta is preventing the officers of Border Guard Force (BGF), its affiliated militia in Karen State, from retiring because of intense fighting with resistance forces, low morale, and lack of new recruits. According to [a BGF major](#), there is a "personality cult and subordinates tend to step down along with their leaders."

## SHAN

On Sept 6th, Kachin Independence Army and regime troops clashed in [Kutkai Township](#), injuring four civilians, including a 7-year-old child who suffered wounds in his thigh, knee, and heel. On Sept 19th, fighting broke out between the junta and Moebye People's Defense Force, and regime soldiers used 100 villagers they abducted in [Pekon Township](#) as human shields. On Sept 20, the Shan State Progress Party killed 3 junta soldiers and wounded 6 others. After the clashes, the regime closed schools, set up checkpoints, and ordered the village to report the activities of ethnic armed organizations in [Mongmit Township](#). On Sept 21st, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army conducted a [forced recruitment campaign](#) and abducted an 8th-grade student, prompting many youths to flee their villages. [RCSS and SSPP](#) are two rival Shan armed organizations that have resumed fighting in southern Shan State after a year of truce. On Sept 21, RCSS and SSPP exchanged fire for 20 minutes near Loi Hung Mountain, and there were no civilian casualties.

## RAKHINE

Since the resumption of fighting between the Arakan Army and the Burmese military, the total number of IDPs in Rakhine state has surpassed [16,000](#). Those escaping the armed conflict are in desperate need of food, medicine, and shelter. There are at least 7,000 women, while a majority of the total number are elderly and children under the age of 18. On Sept 2, about 19 muslims were [arrested](#) in Gwa Township for violating Burma's Immigration Act - unjustified travel restrictions imposed on most muslims to deny their freedom of movement. Arbitrary arrest and detention continues throughout Rakhine. A total of [40](#) individuals from Maungdaw, Kyauk Taw, Ponna Kyunt, Kyauk Pru and Mrauk U townships were arrested - most of which were not given a reason for their arrest and/or detention. On Sept 8, U Ba Shwe from Kuon Ownsu village in Kyauk Taw township stepped on a [landmine](#). Five days later on Sept 11, U Maung Aye Sein from Thamin Krie Rar village in Min Bya township also stepped on a landmine. Both lost their legs.

## CENTRAL BURMA

In Yangon, at least seven civilians were killed in [three separate shootings](#) by the military junta, though in one of the shootings, two innocent civilians were randomly shot while gunshots targeted a military soldier. A protest in Kyeemyindaing Township to retain the current UN ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, also led to the [arrest of 15 people](#), which included two freelance journalists. Two were injured, one of which was shot and the other beaten. In Mandalay, resistance forces [released two political prisoners and killed two police officers](#) during tightened security measures due to the arrival of Min Aung Hlaing. Though eight prisoners were initially released, six were recaptured. [Four men were also found dead](#) with their throats slit in Burma's capital, likely due to assassinations by a pro-junta militia group, the Blood Comrades. They are thought to be responsible for at least 20 anti-military deaths since this April.