

# **WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS**

**CALL FOR A NEW ERA OF REFORM**

( 2022 )

# Women Trailblazers

## Call for a New Era of Reform



## Honor

In Burma, stereotypes for women have limited their leadership positions and power in decision making processes. In particular, the traditional patriarchal stereotype that women have no place in politics has been internally imposed in Burmese society and practices. Although it is undeniable that many women have participated and supported various sectors in Burmese historical political movements, women's political participation, as well as their struggles and sacrifices, have been obscured and omitted from historical records.

With the purpose to maintain a historical record, Burmese Women's Union (BWU) has thus tried to document the essential role of women's political participation in the Spring Revolution, which would bring a dramatic change to the Burmese political turning point in 2021. Despite the fact that overwhelming numbers of women participated in the Spring Revolution from different sectors and in various ways, many women were excluded from documented history due to limited resources to get interviews from our side. BWU thus sincerely requests for understanding for this incomplete record of women's political participation.

Experiences of women participants in this short document, "Women Trailblazers Call for a New Era of Reform" are crucial to the history of women's political participation in Burma. In fact, if the participants did not bravely disclose their engagement, we would not be able to produce this document. BWU thus

sincerely recognizes and honors the contributions of everyone who willingly and bravely shared their experiences and who believe in this paper despite difficulties and security challenges.

Burmese Women's Union

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## Introduction

Similar to patriarchal societies around the world in which history has been recorded predominantly by and about men, in Burma there is little documentation about women's participation and leadership in politics. Many Burmese women took an active role in the anti-colonial struggle, but there are scarce resources to study this history due to a lack of systematic records.

In the 1988 uprising and later democratic movements, many women actively participated in various ways, sacrificing their time, labor, and sometimes their lives for the struggle. The women's movement has gained momentum since the 1988 uprising, but even up until now Burmese society is weak to acknowledge women's rights and gender equality. Moreover, as the prolonged civil war grinds on in many parts of the country, Burmese women are targets of war and among the most vulnerable members of a war-torn society. However, such events fail to be documented, and women's role in politics and their real suffering in prolonged conflict are far from fully known.

Border-based women's organizations including the Burmese Women's Union (BWU), which was founded in 1995, have analyzed the importance of women's roles, including their participation in social revolution, the experiences of women political prisoners, and the struggles of ethnic women living under military dictatorship. BWU and other organizations aim to document these experiences and make the facts of women's roles and suffering more widely known.

Historical experiences from all around the world have shown us that social revolutions reach their goals neither easily nor quickly. Rather, they gain ground over time, and women are among the key social forces sustaining social revolutions and making them resilient.

Because the BWU strongly believes that it is important to understand women's participation in the 2021 Spring Revolution in detail, it now collects in the sections of this report documentation of:

- (1) participation of grassroots women,
- (2) participation of women from industry,
- (3) participation of women government employees,
- (4) participation of women human rights advocates,
- (5) participation of women from political parties,
- (6) participation of women in the armed struggle,
- (7) participation of women with disability, and
- (8) participation of LGBTI people.



## Brief background of the Burmese Women's Union

The Burmese Women's Union (BWU) is an organization formed by women leaders from different regions who participated in the 8888 Democracy Uprising. The BWU grew out of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), from which seven women organizers initiated a broad-based women's movement that later became independent from any political organizations and influence.

The BWU was founded on January 7, 1995 by seven women leaders along the Thai-Burma border and aims to: promote women's leadership in different political organizations that support the anti-military struggle; promote the rights of women and empower young women with democratic aspirations from various backgrounds all across Burma, including women in refugee camps and those forced to migrate to neighboring countries; and promote women working to meet their daily needs and achieve self-sufficiency.

BWU is a multi-ethnic organization that learns from the different experiences of various ethnic women's organizations while collaborating together. BWU seeks peace, justice, equality, and a federal democratic Burma where women play a significant role in the political arena at national, regional, and local levels. BWU collaborates with other women's organizations to establish the Women's League of Burma (WLB), an umbrella front for the women's movement in the country. Nearly three decades since its founding, the BWU still stands firmly working for its goals.

## Women's Information Under Attempted Military Coup

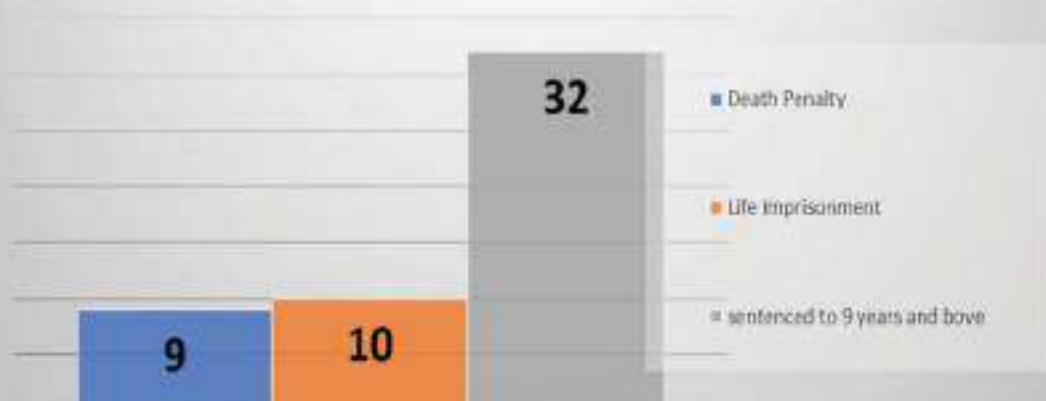
(1 Feb 2021 - 31 August 2022)



This information is only based on AAPP and BWU. Therefore, numbers could be higher on the ground.

Among the 191 women who were sentenced, this chart shows numbers of women who were sentenced to maximum punishment.

(1 Feb 2021 - 31 August 2022)



This information is only based on AAPP and BWU.

## Methodology

BWU compiled data from reliable sources of media, civil society organizations, and organizations working to promote human rights, and staff from BWU's information and documentation departments conducted key stakeholder interviews with women participating in the Spring Revolution. The stakeholders include women activists from the health and education sectors, wives of Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) soldiers, former women police members, women members of armed resistance organizations, and women taking part in the non-violent movement. BWU's researchers also interviewed women who have played supporting roles, including housewives, women working in industry, and last, but not least, women with disability. This paper thus documents a wide set of experiences of women participating in the Spring Revolution.

In total, 34 women from different regions and strata were interviewed for this paper, but their names and those of family members have been changed for security reasons or it may not be necessary depending on the situation.



## Political context of the 2021 military coup and the Myanmar Spring Revolution

Not long after Burma gained independence, military leaders took control of the country with the coup in 1962, which introduced a military rule for twelve years. In 1974, the ruling body adopted a one-party authoritarian constitution that constitutionally established the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) as the only ruling party of the state. As successive Burmese governments failed to implement the *Panglong* Agreement, which was an agreement between ethnic national groups and the majority Burman leaders to establish a new nation after colonial rule, ethnic groups started calling for autonomy and self-determination from the central government.

Deteriorating socio-economic conditions caused by BSPP rule led to a country-wide uprising on August 8, 1988 (8-8-88): a historic event that catalyzed the pro-democracy movement in Burma. The Burmese military responded with force against protesters, and another crackdown ensued after the next military coup in September 1988 installed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Later many citizens were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and oppressed widely for the military to maintain rule.

The military government held multi-party general elections in 1990, but it failed to honor the results of the elections, in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) had won a landslide victory. Later, elected representatives were harassed and detained; many of them fled to border areas to escape

persecution and later formed a government in exile, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).

From 1990 until 2010, under various names, the military junta continued to rule the country. Finally, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regime adopted the 2008 military-dominated constitution after a prolonged drafting process. Ethnic armed organizations and pro-democracy organizations had strongly opposed the pro-military constitution and subsequent 2010 general election. Nevertheless, popular pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi entered the 2012 by-elections, claiming the need to work both inside and outside the *Hluttaw* (parliament) to reform the 2008 constitution and initiate a coordinated democratic reform movement.

After the 2010 general election, the semi-civilian government led by U Thein Sein called for peace with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and initiated a series of peace talks. A Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was eventually signed between the government and eight EAOs on October 15, 2015. However, 21 EAOs had participated in the talks, and many of these EAOs failed to sign as they were not happy with the agreement. Later, a total of ten parties signed on to the NCA. Signatory members of the NCA and others collaborated with the government and convened a series of political discussions on the future of the nation. Under the NLD administration, the Union Peace Conference was renamed the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Union Peace Conference” and many key stakeholders convened to discuss constitutional reform initiatives outside of parliament.

However, implementation of the NCA struggled with many obstacles: the conventions did not include all key parties, with many EAOs left on the outside; there was weak cooperation between forces seeking reform of the 2008 constitution, especially between the NLD and EAOs; and the military continued to exert control of political dialogues during NLD government rule.

After the NLD's landslide victory in the 2015 general election, the NLD formed a government and then won again in the 2020 general election. The NLD was then accused of committing massive vote fraud, and finally, the military staged a coup on February 1, 2021.

Since the coup, the military has continuously cracked down violently on peaceful protestors demonstrating against the coup. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)-Burma, from February 2021 to August 2022, 2,142 civilians were killed, and 14,956 people were detained or imprisoned by the junta. Among them, data collected by the BWU show that 2,372 women were detained or imprisoned and 241 women were killed during the crackdown. The collection of these figures has been hindered by internet shutdowns and blackouts of the communication system, and the actual numbers may very well be higher.



## Participation of women in various aspects of the Spring Revolution

When we look at the beginning of the Spring Revolution in Burma, we see that women activists and women workers from factories took a leading role in the movement. Their brave leadership originated from anti-coup mobilization but their efforts lent strength to people seeking to end all forms of discrimination in Burmese society and ultimately to the call for a federal democratic union.

People who have participated in the Spring Revolution have come from all backgrounds, including government servants, members of the business community, factory workers, activists, performing artists, students, and community leaders. Women of all ages, LGBTI people, and religious minorities have also been active in the movement. When we consider the entire Spring Revolution in Burma, women's participation has been no less than that of men.

### A). Participation of grassroots women

If citizens from all walks of life can work together harmoniously, there is a possibility of ending the military dictatorship in Burma, and the movement cannot neglect the important role that grassroots women have played in this effort. The anti-coup movement in Burma started with a popular act of banging pots and pans, which received international attraction. Many grassroots women—that is, ordinary women playing no formal role in political organizations—were among those who actively participated in Than Bone Tee (the banging of pots and pans) at nighttime. Grassroots women also provided food and water to street protestors since the beginning of anti-coup protests, and many mothers and elders have actively encouraged their children to join the movement while providing sanctuary to protestors during violent crackdowns by security forces.

Ma Khine (not her real name), who actively supported the anti-coup protestors, explained the following.

*“I cheer and applaud the protestors on the streets. I offer them water, and at night time at 8 p.m., I bang pots and pans at home. When the security forces started making arrests of those banging pots and pans, entering into their home and throwing hand-held catapults at anybody they see on the veranda of a house, it became so dangerous. I consistently did it for months until they said to stop. I support the CDM government servants, and in particular, I take responsibility to support a CDM government employee.”*

Ma Thandar (not her real name), a single mother who joined the Mothers' Union along with her small child, explained her action as doing as much as she could, though she would like to be even more active and join in public protest.

*“I help with finance. I joined the movement by providing cold drinks, water, food, and medicines. My colleagues said it was too dangerous joining the protest with a little kid, so later I restrained myself. I continue to provide finance. I continue to help the movement by typing, looking out for security, and providing food to the activists.”*

In poverty-stricken Burma, many housewives have strived to make ends meet while supporting their sons, daughters, and husbands who participate in the movement.

Ma Khine explained how she survives. *“A year after the coup, I had no income. My son and daughter who had supported the family abandoned their jobs and joined the revolution. Now I sell things on the streets.”*

A single mother, Ma Thandar explained how she supports the Spring Revolution movement while struggling for her living:

*“In fact, I am so deprived of living. I earn a living by working as a salesperson in a clothing shop in the market for 200,000 Kyats. I donate some and the rest I spend on my kid.”*

It is observed that many women are eager to join in the movement to end

military rule despite their economic hardships and threats to their personal security.

*“As a citizen, I don’t like military dictatorship. As a citizen, I despise it because it is an attempt to destroy the future of our country,”* Ma Khine said.

*“To end the dictatorship, I will join the movement as much as I can. I will be part of this movement until the end of my life. If I am arrested, I won’t betray the movement. If I am arrested, I will oppose them with my spirit,”* Ma Thandar said.

These grassroots women believe the revolution is the only means to secure their lives and end violent military rule. With every chance they get, they support the revolution, requesting weapons and supplies for the movement, rather than necessities for their own well-being, in order to live in a world of security and justice in the future.

*“I would like to request real weapons for the combatants. Please provide real weapons to them. As they (the military) are going around and oppressing the people, people are resisting and they pay the price for their patriotism with their lives. [The military’s] weapons are unrivaled,”* a woman from Ban Bway Kone village of Yinmarbin Township said.

Many women in conflict zones of middle Burma face losing their houses as the Burmese military sets them ablaze. Yet many of them still contribute to the movement from their collections of gold and valuables.

Ma Zinmay (not her real name), 25, who actively participates in online fundraising for the Spring Revolution called ‘click to donate,’ said;

*“I join in the Spring Revolution by providing funding as well as being a ‘clicker’ (online funding movement). I also encourage other people to join. I don’t support the parts of the economy that support the military—I don’t buy even a single cigarette.”* She emphasized the important role of clickers in the movement:

*“A ‘clicker’ is important for the revolution. If everybody is taking up arms in the jungle, it would weaken the flow of funding that covers the expenses of the movement. It is undeniable that clickers have played a central role in sustaining the movement until today.”*

Ma Zinmay continues to explain that those who support the movement digitally are endangered by frequent checks of their mobile phones and other devices at military checkpoints. People can be arrested for their small actions such as even clicking ‘like’ on Facebook pages relating to the People’s Defence Force (PDF).

The role of such grassroots women to support the movement must be documented and acknowledged, as they are actively working for the movement while simultaneously striving to meet their own daily needs.

*I will work as much as I can till the victory of  
the Spring Revolution. If we fail, the future generation  
could suffer more oppression and deprivation.  
We must end this unjust rule during our time.*

( Ma Ei - not her real name )

## B). Participation of women from industry

Factories and manufacturing worksites are important for a country to run its economy. If these factories and worksites cannot run, the economy will collapse.

Women labor leaders have been issued warrants for participating in the Spring Revolution and the military has charged them with acts relating to sedition against the state. Many women have had their passports revoked by authorities, Ma Phyo Nandar Soe, a central executive member of the Confederation of Trade Unions in Myanmar (CTUM), said.

*“All of our executive members are charged with Penal code 124 A — high treason.”* Article 124 of the Penal Code criminalizes “any attempt to bring into hatred or contempt, or excite disaffection towards the government,” but the coup leader amended the provision to prohibit “any attempt to cause hatred, contempt, and disaffection toward the military and military personnel, besides the government.” *“The authority also announced that our passports are revoked.”*

She explained that women laborers are striving to secure peace and security for the future generation.

Ma Ei (not her real name) said, *“I will work as much as I can till the victory of the Spring Revolution. If we fail, the future generation could suffer more oppression and deprivation. We must end this unjust rule during our time.”*

Ma Htet (not her real name) said she could not go out to the street to protest during the movement, but “we can do many other things.”

*“I join in the Spring Revolution with my own will and I will work till the end of military rule. Taking up arms or joining protests is not the only way to join the revolution. You join the movement if you decide not to use MYTEL (the military-affiliated telecom service provider)”.*

Ma Soe Soe (not her real name), a factory worker, also shares her activity that she has been campaigning for people not to use military company-produced goods as much as she can.

*“In the meantime, I have to worry about my living alone. I am working for my living. But I don’t use MYTEL service, I encourage friends not to use it. I support the revolution as much as I can”.*

Many women from factory occupations have decided to support the movement as much as they can, even though they are struggling with multiple hardships under economic pressure in an unstable political situation.

*“We have to fight for our own rights. It is not enough to witness others in the movement. We must fight ourselves. We can do the easy thing and just struggle to make our own living. Or we can join the movement by boycotting military products, not showing up in places where the military wants us to be. We are able to participate as much as we can,”* a factory laborer Ma Htet (not her real name) said.

*We have to fight for our own rights.*

*It is not enough to witness others in the movement.*

*We must fight ourselves. We can do the easy thing and*

*just struggle to make our own living. Or we can join*

*the movement by boycotting military products,*

*not showing up in places where the military wants us*

*to be. We are able to participate as much as we can*

*( a factory laborer Ma Htet - not her real name )*

### C. Participation of women government staff

If government servants, through their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), do not comply with the orders of the junta, the government bureaucracy can be paralyzed. As CDM gained momentum among civil servants from the health and education departments, the new military leaders did not have full control of the bureaucracy.

Naw Tanar Htoo, a nurse, decided to risk her life and join the CDM, knowing she could, at worst be arrested or murdered for her action. She explained her reason for joining the CDM movement:

*“I decided to join the CDM as I don’t like the military dictator. Because I don’t want our next generation to suffer similarly to us. I want a genuine democracy.”*

She is presently working with the Karenni Nurse Association (KNA), an association of medical workers formed after the coup.

A teacher from a government technical school also explained her decision about why she joined CDM.

*“I don’t want to continue to work under their rule. I don’t want to see my son and daughter with similar lives. I really don’t like the rote-learning system.”*

When staff from the police department decide to join the CDM, they also face tremendous risk similar to members of the armed forces (Burmese military). If these police officers are declared as deserters from their base camp, they

could face harsh punishment and their families could also face dangerous consequences. It is worse if they are the bread-earners. A female officer from the Karenni State Police force said she has to leave her paralyzed father at home and he misses her.

*“I don’t want to work under an authoritarian state and its oppressive system. For that reason, I decided to join the CDM. I take a salary provided by citizens and I serve as a policeman working for the people. I don’t want to follow orders without considering what is right and what is wrong,”* female police officer Mi Shar said.

The Karenni State Consultative Committee, a leading body of the anti-coup alliance, announced the formation of a “Karenni State Police” on August 25, 2021, with 30 percent of the force being female officers.

As the CDM continues in its second year, many government employees participating in CDM face countless challenges and risks. In order to avoid arrest, they often have to leave their family homes, including sometimes their young children, and they struggle to survive without their previous earnings.

*“I don’t want to see the next generation with a similar fate. I also don’t want to see my kid belittled as non-CDM kids. There are numerous challenges that we face. I almost lost my mind when I left my kids. I soothe myself by saying that one day they will be proud of their mom’s work,”* a female police member of the Demawso Township police department, Police No. 86, explained her feelings.

“It was me and my parents living at home. My father died in Loikaw in an emergency. I can see my old mom only at a home for the elderly and I don’t think she can eat properly. I want to stay with her at that home, with some music playing, if the revolution wins,” police officer Mi Shar said.

A nurse, Naw Tanar Htoo said, *“As the family members are struggling hard to meet ends, I cannot go home and the family is separated. I feel depressed when we are in prolonged displacement. But I calm myself as we are still comparatively better than those who died and those who lost their family members.”*

We can also observe the roles played by some wives of active Burmese military soldiers who have participated in the Spring Revolution. Soldiers’ wives have persuaded them to join the CDM and have assisted them to reach secure places.

*“I assisted much more. For the safety of their trip, I had to collect information and prepare for the family including for the kids,”* the wife of an army medical officer, Ma Wint War (not her real name), said about her adventure to join the CDM.

*“In the beginning when I arrived at the place, I felt lost in the meaning of my life for 2-3 days. I was almost out of money and I had to pay many bills, including rent. I broke down and cried. I make it through with the support of the people and the will that I must stand for my daughter.”*

The wife of CDM army captain Sanay said it was a real adventure to join the CDM, as many people intensely hate members of the Burmese military for their inhumane abuses, such as illicit arrest, torture, kidnapping, and murder.

*“I persuaded him to join the CDM. I gave the reason, as we can leave the military if we join the CDM. He decided on it as he witnessed unjust arrests and beatings, and he realized that he should leave the army. Otherwise, he would have to follow orders and do the same.”*

A lady corporal sergeant clerk from Yangon Military Command’s Record Unit told the BWU how she dealt with the challenge of joining the CDM, and she thinks her decision was right.

*“When I joined the CDM, I already knew I couldn’t go back. It is a serious offense to join the CDM, I could be sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for high treason. The army is getting even worse now. As I witness army units setting fire to villages, I know that I must not work in an organization that is making trouble against its own people. I am satisfied with my decision which I believe was the right one.”*

The lady corporal sergeant also encourages fellow soldiers of the Burmese army and their family members to stand with the CDM.

*“I was born and grew up in the army and I lived in the army until I wed a military officer. I chose this path because I cannot stand injustice. You should think of the future of your kids. The difficulties in this time will bring happiness in the future,”* the spouse of Captain Sanay told the BWU.

As time goes by, people participating in CDM who have personally paid a high price for their participation in the Spring Revolution have received lesser media attention for their work. Nevertheless, CDM government servants are resilient and stand strong until the end of military rule. We must keep records right for these women who have sacrificed in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

*It was me and my parents living at home.  
My father died in Loikaw in an emergency.  
I can see my old mom only at a home for the elderly and  
I don't think she can eat properly. I want to stay with her  
at that home, with some music playing,  
if the revolution wins. ( Mi Shar, police officer )*

*As the family members are struggling hard to meet ends,  
I cannot go home and the family is separated.  
I feel depressed when we are in prolonged displacement.  
But I calm myself as we are still comparatively better than  
those who died and those who lost their family members.  
( Naw Tanar Htoo, a nurse )*

*I was born and grew up in the army and I lived in the  
army until I wed a military officer. I chose this path  
because I cannot stand injustice. You should think of  
the future of your kids. The difficulties in this time  
will bring happiness in the future.  
( the spouse of Captain Sanay )*

## D. Participation of human rights activists

A common target of the military junta's arrests and harassment is human rights activists who are opposing the military by various means. For that reason, many women activists are arrested and tortured in an effort to suppress their activism. Many of them have suffered from sexual violence when they are in detention and interrogation.

According to the *Myanmar Pressphoto Agency*, a resident of Ma-U-Bin Township who was arrested reported that she witnessed a woman activist from her township in Ayeyarwaddy Region be sexually harassed by a military commander during her interrogation in May 2022. This incident occurred in front of the woman's own father.<sup>1</sup>

*"The investigation was led by Battalion 216<sup>th</sup> commander, Maj. Thet Lwin Oo of Light Infantry Division (LID) No. 11. The girl was around the age of 18. He led the army unit in the interrogation, but it happened in the police station,"* she said as she recounted the story of what she witnessed.

The military's cruel treatments have driven many women to participate in the Spring Revolution until the end, said Ms. N (not her real name), an executive member of the Yangon Computer University Teachers' Union and a representative of the Yangon University Students' Union. She is also a member of the Women's Alliance.

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1 Myanmar Pressphoto Agency. (May 13, 2022). Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/7484860881554874?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/7484860881554874?_rdc=1&_rdr)

*“If I were asked why I join in the revolution, it is because we have endured negative consequences and oppression from the repeated military coups in Burma. When we witness with our own eyes unjust arrests, imprisonments, and murders throughout the country, I worry the next generation will suffer a similar fate if this bad system lasts.”*

A woman leader of the Women’s Alliance from Kalay Township explained how she has been involved in the Spring Revolution even though she was inexperienced in politics.

*“In the beginning, I wasn’t involved in the movement as I don’t know politics. But when I witnessed the military use arms to conduct violence against citizens, I decided to join the movement as much as I could. It doesn’t require a deep understanding of politics”.*

A key factor keeping women out of politics is the common view in society that women are key to serving the family and that politics is only men’s affair.

A woman leader of the Women’s Alliance from Kalay Township explained her experiences with social pressure. Even though it was not meant as harassment, people say that *“You are a girl and it is enough to fulfill the obligations that come with that. Your family needs you and cannot be without you.”*

Many mothers have allowed their sons and daughters to join the revolution. Ms. N, a member of the Women’s Alliance, said her parents didn’t oppose her decision to join the movement, but she feels sorry that she is the only daughter in the family and must leave them.

Women in the movement believe they are fighting to end the military's unjust rule, but they must also work to challenge gender-based discrimination and stigma concurrently. Ms. N resolutely said of these simultaneous tasks:

*“We started the Spring Revolution not only to overthrow the military dictatorship, but also to fight against century-old religious extremism, discrimination, injustice, segregation, and stigmatic thinking at the same time”.*

For this reason, women intentionally use their sarongs (*Htamein*) as a banner of the Spring movement in order to remove dogmatic ideas, as many people traditionally believe women's sarongs can diminish someone's power or influence.

A woman leader of the Women's Alliance from Kalay Township also confirms her determination that women activists will not give up even though they face many limitations and challenges against them for participation in the Spring Revolution.

*“I am so exhausted working at present. But I don't consider giving up the cause. I have been through many challenges and lost many things. If I retreat, I will lose twice”.*

*We started the Spring Revolution not only to overthrow the military dictatorship, but also to fight against century-old religious extremism, discrimination, injustice, segregation, and stigmatic thinking at the same time.*

( N )



## E. Participation of women members of political parties

Compared to earlier eras, political parties became more active and strengthened after the 2015 general election, and more parties emerged to represent ethnic nationalities. Women are participating more actively in politics, working for political education, and mobilization of the parties.

In the 2020 general election, 6,969 female candidates contested, a 37 percent increase from the 2015 election.<sup>2</sup> However, the momentum of women's participation in the political process was destroyed after the military coup on February 1, 2021, when the military attempted to annul the 2020 election results. All parties were forced to suspend their activities after the coup and many political leaders who opposed the coup had to escape from persecution. Many leaders of the previously ruling NLD party have been detained. In addition, the junta confiscated many houses of political party members for their active role in the anti-coup movement.

Hnin Hnin Hmway of the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) told the BWU that *“I was charged with penal code act 505 A along with 27 other accusations on March 10, 2021, and I went into hiding. On February 18, 2022, the junta issued a warrant and confiscated my home.”*

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2 International Women's Development Agency. (November 2, 2020). Inside the Women's Movement Sweeping Myanmar's Election. Retrieved from <https://iwda.org.au/inside-the-womens-movement-sweeping-myanmars-election/>

A woman leader of the Kayah State Democratic Party (KSDP) described her political activities during the coup:

*“I cannot go and work with the public. It was a crisis. Even if I work for social support, it must be low-profile. I have to work individually rather than representing the party,”* she said.

Hnin Hnin Hmway of the DPNS takes responsibility as a general secretary in her party and in the National Unity Consultative Committee (NUCC), an umbrella alliance of the movement representing multiple anti-regime political groups, and in the Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) of the movement. She continues pursuing objectives to end the military dictatorship and establish a future Federal Union.

Ma Myintzu, a ward member of the NLD Ayarwaddy Region explained her difficulties, *“Though I have decided to work as a brick or sand in the revolution, my family is not strong like me. We have had arguments about the cause”*.

*“I have pursued total uprooting of the dictatorship since the beginning and I believe I can do it one day. I believe in my cause. Now the ethnic and people from the plains are united in one spirit. I believe the revolution must win,”* she firmly said to the BWU.

Hnin Hnin Hmway discussed how weak unity among political forces has made it difficult for her to be effective. Some people are holding onto big-party ideas and chauvinism; there is a weak chain of command among fighting forces; and

the NUG has failed to follow up with the agreed Federal Charter, raising false hopes and miscommunicating mistaken ideas among. Moreover, the movement has been struggling with major challenges, such as ASEAN's five points consensus, the sham peace overture of the junta, the sham promise of 2023 general elections, and the NLD's vague proposal of "*Su-Yway-Hlut*."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the pro-democracy movement is challenged by weak unity among the forces and financial and physical hardships.

The facts nevertheless show women leaders of political parties relentlessly working in the movement to end military rule.

*I cannot go and work with the public. It was a crisis.  
Even if I work for social support, it must be low-profile.  
I have to work individually rather than  
representing the party.  
( A woman leader of the Kayah State Democratic Party )*

3      "*Su-Yway-Hlut*" proposal of the NLD means demands "to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to honor 2020 election results, and releasing all political prisoners" as conditions to talk with the junta.



## F). Participation of women in the armed struggle

The resistance intensified as the junta's forces systematically use violence, illegal arrests, and arson of innocent civilians' homes to harass the anti-coup movement. Many women have also joined in the armed resistance against the junta.

Daw Rati Ohn, a lecturer and head of the department of Kalay Government Technical Institute, told *the Irrawaddy* journal that she chose to join in the armed struggle when the security forces violently cracked down on peaceful demonstrations during the early days of the coup.<sup>4</sup>

And a woman designer who abandoned her profession and joined the armed resistance in Karenni region told *the Burma News International - Myanmar Peace Monitor* that “*They hold guns and tyrannize unarmed civilian like us. It was so disgusting and that is why I decided to join the resistance.*” Her interview was mentioned in the article “Interview with a woman fighter in Karenni region.”<sup>5</sup>

As more women join in the armed resistance, the newly emerged People's Defence Forces (PDF) are growing with women troops. On September 25, 2021, the People Revolutionary Army (PRA) initiated a military training for women fighters with 51 women.<sup>6</sup>

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4 The Irrawaddy. (October 6, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=3146930225551681>

5 Burma News International- Myanmar Peace Monitor. (October 4, 2021). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3QHqMeQ>

6 Delta News Agency. (September 25, 2021). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3PEbJkM>

Additionally, on October 26, 2021, there was an announcement that a women's guerilla force was formed in Myaung Township of Sagaing Region. The spokesperson of the women's troop told the *Myanmar Pressphoto Agency* about the objectives of the force as follows:<sup>7</sup>

*“Victory for the Spring Revolution will be when there is an end to military dictatorship. In addition, we are working for gender equality”.*

The most robust in military defiance, the Karenni National Defence Force (KNDF) also announced in May 2022 that its Battalion no. 5 is specially formed with women troops. A female company commander, Ma Angles Moe, expressed her concerns in regards to women troops:

*“As the first company of women troops, there is much interest in it. All eyes are watching them to see if they can perform orders effectively and there are many other worries about what they are able to do,”* Angles Moe said. She is a CDM school teacher and she was elected by women troops as their leader and a company commander.

The deputy company commander of KNDF's Battalion no. 5, Naw Bway Phaw Htoo, said in regards to choosing her as a commander, *“I was so excited to be selected as a deputy commander. Many members selected me because they think I can perform, and I must work to deserve it.”*

As the first women troop, they faced various questions from their colleagues.

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<sup>7</sup> Myanmar Pressphoto Agency. (October 29, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/6409161419124831>

She said as follows:

*“As the first women unit was formed, other PDF colleagues asked what are you going to do? I responded to them that we will do what you are not expecting,” she said.*

Women troops face different obstacles than males. An officer in-charge from Myaung Women’s guerilla force explained the situation in the interview with Myanmar Pressphoto Agency as follows:<sup>8</sup>

*“We face more difficulties. The body structures of men and women are not the same, so when we prepare our bodies for battle, there are additional personal issues that women carefully need to resolve.”*

In the BWU’s interviews, some women had different ideas justifying their choice to join the struggle against the military. A female medic of KNDF’s Battalion no. 3, Company 1, Dat-Khae (not her real name) thinks an armed struggle doesn’t necessarily mean violence.

*“Holding arms doesn’t mean pure violence. If someone unjustly oppresses others, then the oppressed will struggle with force to liberate themselves. They see the armed struggle as violence, as they have no such experiences. Whatever they say, I will fight for our freedom until victory,” she said.*

Ms. Angles Moe, a commander of KNDF’s Battalion no. 5 said that *“the junta*

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8 Myanmar Pressphoto Agency. (October 29, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/6409161419124831>

*is terrible. Many people died and many youths have been arrested and killed. Many people lost their lives and properties. People should not be oppressed like we have been. To overcome and to survive, it can only happen through revolution,”* she shared her opinion.

Deputy Commander Naw Bway Phaw Htoo also justified her decision to join the armed struggle as follows:

*“If the junta’s forces arrested women, they usually humiliate them by words, commit rape and sexual violence. We can’t withdraw. They will kill us even if we surrender. We must fight back.”*

The armed struggle is a particular challenge for women physically and many challenges weigh against them. However, in a society with weak practices of gender equality, women’s decision to join the armed struggle is also a move to end gender discrimination along with the military dictatorship. Many women who cannot join in person in the armed struggle also contribute major support to the revolution.

*The junta is terrible. Many people died and many youths have been arrested and killed. Many people lost their lives and properties. People should not be oppressed like we have been. To overcome and to survive, it can only happen through revolution.*

*( Ms. Angles Moe, a commander of KNDF's B-05 )*



### G). Participation of women with disability

We cannot neglect the role of women living with disability who struggle against the military dictatorship. Women with disability also face similar oppression under military rule, as the security forces can illegally arrest anyone who opposes them. The challenges put more burdens on women with disabilities, but they resolutely participate in the movement resisting these encounters.

Disabled Ma Pont Pont (not her real name) told her story about how she participated in the Spring Revolution. “Women with disability faced more challenges when they joined the revolution, so they have to struggle against all odds and it is more dangerous for them. They cannot run away like others can. But they join the movement as they are willing despite all these difficulties.”

Similarly, a woman with hearing difficulty, Nway Oo Arr-man (not her real name), told her perspective as follows:

*“For a person with a disability who can be identified easily, it is a major limitation to him or her. As they cannot work easily in public, but they join and support the movement from other able corners,”* Nway Oo Arr-man said.

Ma Pont Pont cannot walk for long, but when she was eager to join the

protests, her father sent her along to the demonstration on a motorcycle. She told of her experiences:

*“I joined the protest almost every day. As I cannot walk, my father sent me along the column of demonstrators, following behind them on a motorbike. The whole family joined, but my mother waited at home”.*

Nway Oo Arr-man also explained the security situation as follows:

*“I can’t do much to prepare for security, as we have no land to escape to. We have to take care of security and stay low profile. I need to get an extra handphone in case.”*

*“If you ask me if I am scared, of course, I am. I have prepared myself for what I may have to deal with. I think daily about what will happen if I am sentenced to prison. I have to think through all of the consequences,”* Ma Pont Pont said.

Despite the fear, these and other women with disability have joined the anti-dictatorship movement resolutely and their important roles must be recorded.

*Women with disability faced more challenges when they joined the revolution, so they have to struggle against all odds and it is more dangerous for them. They cannot run away like others can. But they join the movement as they are willing despite all these difficulties. ( Disabled, Ma Pont Pont - not her real name)*

*For a person with a disability who can be identified easily, it is a major limitation to him or her. As they cannot work easily in public, but they join and support the movement from other able corners. ( Nway Oo Arr-man )*



## H). Participation of LGBTI people

LGBTI people are generally the most discriminated against in society. For that reason, many LGBTI people joined the movement to end military rule, as their oppression could become worse under the junta. For their activism, many of them have been arrested and tortured, and many have encountered sexual violence in the interrogation cells of the junta. The BWU believes the activism of LGBTI people and their roles in the Spring Revolution must be documented.

LGBTI people explained their experiences in the Spring Revolution as follows:

Ah Win said that *“I started with the student CDM movement. Our fellow students gathered and joined the protests, almost daily. I was arrested on May 3 along with two other friends. We had to spend almost a week in interrogation.”*

*“Similar to other people, I joined the street protests as I don’t like the dictator. I was hit with 8 rubber bullets when the military cracked down on the demonstration with violence,”* Than Sin, a beautician, said.

Suusha Shin Thant, a trans person who has been doing research on the theme of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), was arrested at the Myit-Nge checkpoint after colliding with a car. A male friend going along with her lost consciousness in the accident and she was hurt severely on her right leg. They were left on the street untreated for eight hours and were pressured to call their colleagues at gunpoint, to be arrested. The project manager of the Try Organization Maygam (an LGBTI organization) told the story with her consent:

During the interrogation, Ah Win, a trans person, that she dared not express herself as LGBTI, and instead decided to pass through detention as a male. She said as follows:

*“They seemed to be suspicious that I am a trans person. They spoke to me with offensive words. I have heard how a trans person could be treated in detention, so I stood against them in a male form.”*

Suusha Shin Thant was interrogated for eight days at the Myit-Nge detention center and for two days she was denied food and water and her injuries were left untreated. She was reportedly hanged on a tree, beaten all over her body, and her breasts were burned with an electric iron for interrogation. Her phone and money were confiscated, and she was forced to get money from Kpay’s

mobile wallet. She was denied contact with her family members. Maygam received the information later through the lawyer working for her. At present, Suusha has been sentenced to three-year imprisonment with Penal code section 505 A and is facing trial for other charges against her.

Many LGBTI people have encountered bad treatment in prison, such as being mocked for their appearance, with fellow inmates using abusive and sexually humiliating words against them. Many people who dress as a different gender are regularly threatened by their fellow inmates to cut their hair, shave their heads, and be forced to dress as a man. Many LGBTI prisoners are required to pay bribes to prison officials if they want to live in separate LGBTI cells or to dress as they want. Because of these circumstances, many LGBTI people have participated in the movement with serious care.

*“There are people dying, some lost their homes. In the meantime, I can’t stand with a clear conscience being alive. For that reason, I don’t prepare much for my security,”* Ah Win said.

Than Sin, a beautician said that “I don’t have any particular preparation for my security. But I take care of myself, going around with care, eating with care.”

LGBTI people, who maintain different sexual orientations face several forms of discrimination and challenges against them, but they support the Spring Revolution with determination:

*“I have to pass through many difficulties as an LGBTI person. I decided to walk till the end of the road which I have chosen,”* Than Sin said.

Ah Win said that *“I can say there were many challenges I have overcome. But I faced them with a strong belief that I can pass through these difficulties as I work for the Spring Revolution. I will work as much as I can as long as I live.”*

***There are people dying, some lost their homes.  
In the meantime, I can't stand with a clear conscience  
being alive. For that reason, I don't prepare much for  
my security. ( Ah Win )***

## 6. Role of women's participation in the 8888 Uprising and Burma's Spring Revolution

There have been a series of popular protests and demonstrations calling to end the military dictatorship in Myanmar under successive regimes, and in every movement, women have played important roles. Those women who participated in the 8888 general uprisings and in the Spring Revolution of 2021 shared their experiences and outlooks.

*“There was women’s participation in the 1988 uprising. Women joined a protest column of housewives by carrying pots and pans, pestle and mortar, brooms and grinders. The women groups came out to protest by townships,”* Ma Khine told her experience.

Hnin Hnin Hmway shared her view that *“in the 2021 Spring Revolution, there has been more active participation of women and younger girls. They take more leadership roles. The women have set up troops, such as the Myaung Women Guerilla forces, and I am proud that many of them have become trainers in the forces. There was a similar incident, but I can’t say much about it as it is in the present.”*

If we compare the women’s participation in the 8888 popular uprising with the

2021 Spring Revolution, though the number is not as great as in 2021, those who participated in the 88 movements heroically included many brave women who chose to join the armed struggle, but the majority of women activists operated in underground movements in cities.

*“Women’s participation in 1988 was not that strong, but they were heroic. They dared to come out to the front of the movement, they dared to lead and sacrificed their lives, and I am so proud of them. Some joined the ethnic armed forces to continue their struggle,”* Ying Han Pha, a Shan woman, commented.

But a former activist of 1988, Aye Aye Khine, thinks women’s representation in the politics of the Spring Revolution is still weak even though many women are working relentlessly in various sectors.

Aye Aye Khine expressed her opinion that “the representation of women as leaders in politics is still weak. If you ask me what the differences from the past are, I think more women are aware of political knowledge, and their movement is strengthened and broadened. But I say it is strengthened because of the continuous efforts of many.”

But many observers think the armed struggle is particularly strong after the Spring Revolution in 2021, as many parents have allowed their children to join in the struggle to end the military rule.

Ma Khine said, “they (the junta) use violence and kill citizens, and some parents even encouraged their kids to take up arms and fight back. Women and

Generation Z youths especially choose to participate in the armed struggle. I see that Gen-Z women are particularly committed to the anti-coup movement.”

The comments of women activists demonstrate that many women have been fighting against successive military dictatorships and injustice through peaceful protests and armed struggle. These fights have been too risky for their lives, but they have never been reluctant to answer the calls, even if they were arrested and could encounter physical torture and many forms of sexual violence.

Women activists in the Spring Revolution also call to end traditional stigma and discrimination against them. They used the sarongs of women as banners of the movement to annul the common belief that “women’s sarongs can diminish someone’s power or influence.” Their fight in the Spring Revolution marks their courage and acknowledgment of their roles in society. But we should be thankful to women leaders of older generations for their earlier struggles and for their vision, leadership, and guidance.

***Women’s participation in 1988 was not that strong, but they were heroic. They dared to come out to the front of the movement, they dared to lead and sacrificed their lives, and I am so proud of them. Some joined the ethnic armed forces to continue their struggle. ( Ying Han Pha, a Shan woman )***



## Human rights violations against women

During successive oppressive governments, many women who have been fighting against military rule have been denied a dignified living and many have suffered from human rights violations. Until now, the junta continues committing human rights violations against many women, including unjustified arrests, kidnapping, torture, unwarranted imprisonment, denial of proper medical treatments and communication with family while in detention and prison, murder, and sexual violence.

During this struggle against the military junta, there are similar patterns of human rights violations against women. The military particularly uses fear of sexual persecution to prohibit women's participation in the political movement. Nevertheless, despite its profound oppression, the military cannot stop women's activism against the regime.

## A). Arrest, torture, and imprisonment

The junta uses excessive force when they arrest women activists, including humiliation tactics and violence against them, mostly with late-night raids.

When Aye Nandar Soe, chairperson of the Sagaing Education University Students' Union, was arrested on September 19, 2021, security forces in civilian clothes checked the IDs of students at the university gate in the evening and arrested her.<sup>9</sup> Her family members were not informed of her place of detention until seven months after her arrest.

Ma Wutyi Aung, an executive member of the Dagon University Students' Union, suffered from a stroke in December 2021 after she was arrested and sent to Insein prison, but she was denied treatment in a hospital outside of the prison.

Female prisoners have actively joined in protests against prison management if they were mistreated. On May 21, 2022, a prison authority delayed sending a pregnant female prisoner to deliver her baby, causing her infant to die and triggering a prison protest to provide proper medical care to prisoners. During that prison strike, female prisoners were reportedly denied access to drinking water.

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9 All Burma Federation of Student Unions – CEC. (October 19, 2021). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3cgirQe>

*“They are forced to drink water from the pipe of the latrine. The authority stopped providing drinking water after they held protests calling for clean water. The cell is crowded with 60 to 70 female political prisoners. It seems all of them are forced to drink tap water,”* a woman who made a prison visit described what she witnessed to Radio Free Asia on June 9, 2022.<sup>10</sup>

***They are forced to drink water from the pipe of the latrine. The authority stopped providing drinking water after they held protests calling for clean water. The cell is crowded with 60 to 70 female political prisoners. It seems all of them are forced to drink tap water.***

***( A woman who made a prison visit )***

10 RFA Burmese. (June 9, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/10161877465993128>

## B). Sexual harassment, violence, and rape cases

It is widely known to the international community that the junta's security forces have used "rape as a weapon" against their adversaries and many vicious cases of sexual violence against ethnic populations have been recorded by human rights organizations showing the systematic use of rape as a weapon. The Women's League of Burma (WLB) published many of their findings in reports such as "If They Have Hope They Would Speak,"<sup>11</sup> "Same Impunity, Same Patterns,"<sup>12</sup> and "In the Shadow of the Junta."<sup>13</sup>

During interrogation sessions of arrested Spring Revolution leaders and activists, many of them faced unjust lengthy imprisonments and in many cases sexual violence. But these women are reluctant to speak out about these cases in a conservative society and under societal pressures. The BWU collected 35 cases of sexual violence against women activists during the Spring Revolution.

Ma Win Win, who was arrested at the Kyauk-Phyu checkpoint of Pyin-O-Lwin Township, recounted her experience to *Myanmar Now* about

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11 Nov 2014. [https://womenofburma.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/2014\\_Nov\\_VAW\\_Iftheyhadhope\\_TheywouldSpeak\\_Burmese.pdf](https://womenofburma.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/2014_Nov_VAW_Iftheyhadhope_TheywouldSpeak_Burmese.pdf)

12 Jan 2014. [https://womenofburma.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/2014\\_Jan\\_SameImpunitySamePattern\\_Burmese-final.pdf](https://womenofburma.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/2014_Jan_SameImpunitySamePattern_Burmese-final.pdf)

13 19<sup>th</sup> June 2009. <https://womenofburma.org/reports/ending-impunity-0>

how she was sexually harassed during the interrogation by security forces and how she lied to soldiers that she is HIV-positive.<sup>14</sup>

“They touched my upper body and I rejected it. I said kill me, I can’t allow this. I resisted as much as I could. Someone from the group tried to strip my shirt. They were saying just to touch my upper body,” Ma Win Win told the news organization.

Pyu-Saw-Htee, a group of regime-sponsored vigilantes, has conducted sexual harassment and violence against activists similar to the security forces, including underage rape. A local witness reported to the *Burma Human Rights Network* that a leader of Pyu-Saw-Htee committed rape against an eight-year-old girl, a second-grade student, on June 6, 2022, at Nat Inn village of Kant-Ba-Lu Township of Sagaing Region.<sup>15</sup>

*“I know that the Pyu-Saw-Htee members lure the kids to their place and rape them where they are positioned at in a school. Then the soldiers learned of the case, and they the offender up a little to calm the villagers. The villagers are pro-Pyu-Saw-Htee and the school is still open. But the raped girl stopped going to school.”*

When the BWU and other human rights defenders collect information related to sexual violence committed by the military, they encounter many limitations because of bodily threats and societal pressure. The victims often resist

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14 Myanmar Now. (January 17, 2022).  
Retrieved from <https://www.myanmar-now.org/mm/news/10110>

15 BHRN (June 9, 2022).  
Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/BHRNUK/posts/350004473907227>

telling their stories because of social barriers. Many of them think speaking out about their cases cannot bring them justice and they could encounter negative responses as social outcasts.

***They touched my upper body and I rejected it.  
I said kill me, I can't allow this. I resisted as much as  
I could. Someone from the group tried to strip my shirt.  
They were saying just to touch my upper body.  
( Ma Win Win )***

### C). Abduction

When the junta's security forces are searching to arrest members of the Civil Disobedience Movement, party leaders of the NLD, and other activists, if they cannot find their targets, they have been abducting family members, including pregnant women and small children, since the early days of the Spring Revolution. Moreover, to force detainees to talk during the interrogation, the security forces also arrest their kids, from infants to school-aged children.

When arresting or abducting family members, the security forces operate mostly at night time using violence, and sometimes they visit schools to arrest the children of targeted persons. A witness mentioned to the BBC how Maung Thant Bone Way Yan, a four-year-old kid, was taken from his kindergarten.<sup>16</sup>

*“The security forces came as his parents are supporting the PDF. They didn't bring along the ward administrator and local police. They came in plain clothes. They forced the school to give up the kid. If the school denied, they will get him anyway. The security forces arrested their parents first and later go for the kid as supposedly his parents asked to bring their kid.”*

According to the data collected by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)—Burma and the National Unity Government's Ministry of

16 BBC Burmese. (April 7, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/BBCnewsBurmese/posts/5175998635789313>

Women, Youths and Children Affairs, from the beginning of the Spring Revolution until April 2022, 250 children were arrested by security forces. BWU data compiled between the the military coup and June 2022 includes sixty incidents of arrests of family members.

*The security forces came as his parents are supporting the PDF. They didn't bring along the ward administrator and local police. They came in plain clothes. They forced the school to give up the kid. If the school denied, they will get him anyway. The security forces arrested their parents first and later go for the kid as supposedly his parents asked to bring their kid.*

## D. Murders

Several women have been murdered by the military in violent crackdowns, and worse, some have been inhumanely burnt alive. The military has committed inhumane acts against many civilians, including the elderly and pregnant women, without any apparent reason except suspicion that these people oppose the military.

*Yangon Khit Thit media* mentioned that a military unit killed a pregnant girl, Ma Chit Chit Htun of Innwa 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Nan Taw Yar ward of Bago Township at 9:30 p.m. on January 31, 2022, without any apparent reason.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the North-Yesagyo local guerilla troop, N-YSO, stated that the Burmese military burned three women alive and two other non-combatant civilians, including a woman five-months pregnant.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from murders by the Burmese military, many women face dangers caused by the lack of rule of law during this time of political instability. A grandmother from Min Phu village, Min Bya Township of Rakhine State, was killed in a robbery on June 18, 2022.<sup>19</sup>

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17 Khit Thit Media, (February 1, 2022).

Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1414909445613064>

18 The Irrawaddy. (15 June, 2022).

Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/theirrawaddyburmese/posts/5756074367770001>

19 Border News Agency, (June 20, 2022).

Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=175519974890317&id=107469705028678](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=175519974890317&id=107469705028678)

## E). Negative Consequences of human rights violations

Burma has experienced prolonged conflict and years of military dictatorship, and many citizens have experienced misery as victims of violence and forced migration, with many becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs). In many places, there are almost no programs to help those victims to rehabilitate physically and mentally.

The military generals continue to pursue firm control of their power and keep a watchful eye to repress those who might oppose their rule. Those whose human rights have been violated in the Spring Revolution have yet to get the justice that is urgently required for their physical and mental well-being.

Military forces have committed many forms of violence, torture, and atrocious crimes when searching and randomly arresting those who oppose their rule. In addition, the military rulers allow unlawful acts of their troops and encourage a culture of impunity.

*“When they bring the detainees for interrogation, they are always blindfolded. Those officials who bring the detainees are drunk and smell bad from alcohol. And they give additional trouble to the blindfolded detainees, making them cross over an obstacle or bend their body to pass through the barriers. The fellow security guards shout to them as a form of amusement,”* Ma Shwe Yupar Linn said to *BBC-Burmese* about her insecurities during detention.<sup>20</sup>

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BBC. (Oct 24, 2022).

Retrieved from [https://www.bbc.com/burmese/burma-59029175?fbclid=IwAR11-zWkwIjzPI9f\\_-G\\_Ipx0oXsw2s-G1yVGiQ5wSQ1YYqJh5EePc-mNLU](https://www.bbc.com/burmese/burma-59029175?fbclid=IwAR11-zWkwIjzPI9f_-G_Ipx0oXsw2s-G1yVGiQ5wSQ1YYqJh5EePc-mNLU)

Ma Kathy, a lady who was three-months pregnant, was arrested and detained for four months. She received no proper anti-natal care or other health treatments.

*“I passed through the detention eating whatever I could just to survive and keep my baby alive in the womb, though the foods were bad and unhealthy. The detention center just provided food merely to survive.”* Ma Kathy told a women-oriented news page, *Honest Information (HI)*.<sup>21</sup>

During successive movements against military rule, women have experienced physical, mental, and sexual violence, and their family members have also faced psychological trauma by the social seclusion and stigma that often follows.

***When they bring the detainees for interrogation, they are always blindfolded. Those officials who bring the detainees are drunk and smell bad from alcohol. And they give additional trouble to the blindfolded detainees, making them cross over an obstacle or bend their body to pass through the barriers. The fellow security guards shout to them as a form of amusement.***

***( Ma Shwe Yupar Linn )***

21 Honest Information. (July 18, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/honestinfo/posts/1792147427635325>



## 8. Patriarchy and women's long journey of struggle

In a patriarchal society like Burma, Burmese women grow up with traditional teachings on how they should behave, dress properly, and live in the social environment. If a few women dare to stand in front of the public and participate in politics, they have to struggle with peer pressure, responses from family members, and from society more broadly.

Even though women's participation in politics has progressed as the situation changes, there are numerous derogatory depictions and cartoons humiliating women that persist in the media, including social media platforms. Such cartoons and other depictions have portrayed Army Commander in Chief, Min Aung Hlaing, in women's dresses and wearing lipstick, thus using womanly features to offend him, but simultaneously insulting characteristics of women as weak. In one case, the politically unstable and fragile Burma is portrayed as a divided country map in women's sarong.

However, many in Burmese society welcome women's activism in politics, and women fighters in armed struggle have received particular attention. Many Burmese women from different ethnic nationalities are included among lists of the most influential women in the world.



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## Conclusion

Women aspire to create a just, equal, and peaceful society. If a nation is at war or in crisis, women are among the most vulnerable in the population. For such reason, when the military staged a coup against the civilian government in February 2021, the very first force opposing the coup were evidently young women and women factory workers. However, women from all nationalities, all religious beliefs, and all different socio-economic backgrounds have struggled against successive dictatorial regimes in Burma, because of the widespread poverty, violence, human rights violations, and exploitation that they have experienced for decades.

Although women have struggled actively and cogently in successive eras against unjust rule, their activities are not robustly recorded in the history of Burma. However, women will continue to struggle for their rights and to achieve justice against unjust rule. The BWU pays tribute to the women trailblazers by documenting their experiences and calling for a new era of reform.

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