



Statement of condemnation of the recent aerial attacks on the civilian population

16th January 2023

On Thursday, January 12th 2023, at around 2:13 pm, four State Administration Council (SAC) fighter jets conducted air strikes in Lay Wah village, Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District. Six bombs were dropped in the village and two more in the surrounding areas. The air strike killed five villagers and injured two others. The deceased victims include a two-year-old infant, her 25-year-old mother, a 35-year-old male villager, and the Roman Catholic catechist and the Baptist pastor of the village. The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) is deeply troubled by the increase in air strikes over the past year, deliberately perpetrated by the military junta against civilian villagers in Karen State. Within the first two weeks of the year 2023, the Burma military has already conducted 13 air strikes in Karen State, killing at least 11 civilians. An estimated 400,000 villagers in Karen State have been forced to displace since the coup.

The Lay Wah air strikes on January 12th completely demolished ten houses and the Baptist church in the village. In addition, two school buildings, the Catholic church, and twenty-one houses also sustained damages. According to a community member, the school was open that day and all students could have died if they hadn't been dismissed early. Under international humanitarian law, a distinction must be made between civilian and military objectives. Attacks against civilian objects are in violation of such law, especially against buildings dedicated to religion, health care and education. Moreover, intentionally attacking these protected buildings constitutes a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Military junta leaders are in charge of ordering air strikes, as per chain of command, and thus are responsible for these heinous crimes, which may also amount to crimes against humanity. Junta leaders must be prosecuted as such. The international community must immediately take concrete action to end these abuses, including:

- Support current investigations and proceedings and seek out additional opportunities to hold the Burma military accountable for its vast array of crimes.
- Increase financial support for local organisations operating on the ground.
- Support coordinated and targeted sanctions on the supply of aviation fuel to the junta, and oil and gas revenues, as well as sanctions against junta officials.

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