



The Human Rights Foundation of Monland Condemns the Ongoing Targeting of Internally Displaced People in Southeastern Burma

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[For Immediate Release]

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) condemns the military junta's ongoing targeting of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Southeastern Burma. At least 200,000 civilians have been forced to flee their homes and seek shelter in the jungle and other remote areas in Karen State, Mon State and Tanintharyi region since the attempted coup on 1 February 2021. In recent weeks, HURFOM has observed an increase in displaced civilians being abducted and tortured by various battalions of the Burma Army. The impacts have been devastating as the ongoing conflict threatens their survival. We call upon the international community to act with urgency and compassion for the thousands of at-risk lives.

On 7 August at noon, residents of Ya Nge village, Thayat Chaung Township, Dawei, who had been fleeing the fighting for the past two months, were beaten and arrested by the military soldiers when they attempted to return home. Soldiers tortured three local men and two women. The women were released. However, the men are still in military custody. In addition to arresting people, the military seized the motorbikes of residents and took them to the 403rd Light Infantry Battalion based in Thayat Chaung for their own use.

Even places of worship and religious practice are being targeted. Monasteries are among the most common safety areas as the monks often offer protection for those fleeing junta-sponsored violence. Now, the military is reinforcing and mobilizing its presence in villages between the Ye and Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State. Soldiers are currently stationed at the monasteries in the villages. This has eliminated a pathway for security and brought new fears for villagers. Due to the heavy presence of Burmese troops, they are also seriously concerned about the possibility of armed clashes. One local told HURFOM: "Our village has become a battlefield, and we are afraid."

Soldiers also continue to abduct civilians to be used as human shields, which most recently occurred on 13 August in Wazun Taw, Yebyu Township, Dawei, where 28 civilians, including women, were forced from their homes to guide junta troops. Household items in Wazun Taw

village were also burned.

In addition, villagers taken as human shields by the military junta column in the Nabu Le area in Yebyu Township on August 8 have still not been released. At least three women are among those arbitrarily arrested. The villagers were abducted when they were fishing and looking for seasonable vegetables. The current situation has made access to food extremely challenging and has only been made worse with crippling inflation. Due to the rapid increase in the price of essential goods and difficulty purchasing food, as the fleeing residents have no work, there is an urgent need for humanitarian aid, including food.

These are just a few of the many cases that the HURFOM fieldworkers have reported on. Since 1 February 2021, at least 4,240 civilians have been arrested and detained, 1,008 injured and nearly 400 killed in HURFOM target areas.

The increasing presence of soldiers in civilian areas threatens their survival and further seeks to worsen their situation. Humanitarian assistance is urgently needed and must be delivered through cross-border aid where long-time, established, and trusted humanitarian responders can safely ensure it reaches those in need. To target displaced communities violates internationally binding agreements, laws and treaties.

Further, international aid agencies and donors, including the UN affiliates, must not partner in any capacity with the junta, particularly in providing humanitarian aid to those affected by the protracted conflict. This effort should be channelled through established community-based organizations founded and led by former refugees as well as ethnic service providers, ethnic revolutions organizations and long-time human rights defenders or departments operating within local governance structures or the National Unity Government. HURFOM calls for an immediate end to the violence and protection for those fleeing ongoing persecution.

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HURFOM was founded by exiled pro-democracy students from the 1988 uprisings, recent activists and Mon community leaders and youth. Its primary objective is restoring democracy, human rights and genuine peace in Burma. HURFOM is a non-profit organization, and all its members are volunteers with a shared vision for peace in the country.

