



# SITUATION UPDATE

## AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2022

### WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA (WLB)

The murder of 11 school children in Sagaing region reawakened the world to the brutality of the junta's murderous coup in Burma/ Myanmar. Just after noon on September 16 in Let Yet Kone village, junta helicopter gunships rained heavy artillery on a temple school, **killing 11 children** and injuring 17 others. On August 2 in Chin State, Paletwa township, Junta troops shot at a ferry carrying 10 primary school students who were on their way home from school, **killing two children** and injuring three. On September 16 in Shan State, Pekhonn township, the junta killed two young girls aged seven and ten when they **shelled a monastery** that was being used as a shelter for 300 Internally Displaced People (IDPs).

These attacks were deliberate, and they are not isolated incidences. It is estimated that the junta has killed at least **380 children** since the coup, and not just from being caught in the cross fire, but deliberate targeted attacks as part of the junta's strategy to cause immense suffering and fear among the population.

There is growing evidence of rape being used as a weapon of war as women experience an escalation in violent sexual attacks and gender-based violence. On August 28, the junta raided two villages in Kani township, Sagaing region, detaining 62 women. The junta **raped** at least seven women between the ages of 25 and 40, including a woman with a mental disability. Earlier that month on August 19, in another village in the township, a 40-year old woman was raped by junta soldiers before being killed along with her 70-year old mother. On August 11, 18 dead bodies were found in Yin Mar Bin township, Sagaing Region. Two of the victims were women, a **16-year old girl** and a 20-year old woman, who were found raped and killed near a cliff. In early August, a woman from Magway Region, Seik Phyu was **brutally tortured, raped** and killed and thrown on the side of the road by junta soldiers.

The number of reported acts of domestic and sexual violence is also rapidly increasing. On September 13, two girls aged 16 and 13 years old were **raped by their father**. Soon afterwards, the eldest daughter committed suicide. Since the coup, **suicide** in Burma/ Myanmar has risen. Women in particular are suffering mental health problems linked to the violence, the economic crisis and dire general health situation. On August 29, a 24-year old **women jumped** from the Nawaday bridge along with her 3-year old daughter. From July 16 to September 15, the news has reported **28 people taking** their life in 25 townships.

Poverty has doubled since March 2020 with approximately 40 percent of the population – 22 million people – living below the poverty line; a decade of progress on poverty reduction undone.

Women have been disproportionately impacted and have no opportunities to earn an income. Many women who have lost their jobs have been forced to turn to sex work. This has forced women to take significant risks in order to feed themselves and their families. The risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking is very real for women and girls. Sex work is criminalized in Burma/ Myanmar and women working in the industry experience physical and sexual violence, rape and **extortion from the military**, police, gangs, and clients.

This situation has prompted many women to seek work abroad, heightening their risk of human trafficking and being sold for domestic servitude or sexual exploitation. On August 8, seven women travelled to UAE on an offer of employment, only to find on arrival that there was no job. They were **sold by human traffickers** and locked in a room in Dubai. They managed to seek help on social media and were returned to Burma/ Myanmar.

The humanitarian need is at its highest, and yet international funding for humanitarian assistance is below 2021 levels. Urgent humanitarian assistance delivered by INGOs has been blocked by the military junta, prompting **UN agencies** to sign memorandums of understanding with the junta. In May 2022, ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance agreed to deliver aid to Burma/ Myanmar under the supervision of the military regime. Unsurprisingly, this aid has **not yet reached the people**. International donors need a new approach, not only has working with the junta proven to be ineffective, it undermines the work of human rights defenders and local humanitarian response efforts.

The number of women political prisoners is at a **record high**. As of the 30 August 2022, a total of 83 post-coup political prisoners, **including 9 women**, are on death row. On August 12, the junta arrest **two young girls**, alleging they are members of the PDF. On August 15, the junta arrested two young women from Aye Thayar in Taunggyi District, accusing them of providing financial support to the PDF. On September 13, 15 strike members were arrested at Pan Pi Ni Street during a demonstration, including journalist, members of student's unions, Myanmar Labour Alliance and the Owl community. Among those arrested were **women and LGBTQ people**.

The **welfare of political prisoners** is of grave concern. Since the coup, 217 people have been killed during interrogations.





## Impact of Military Offensives and Human Rights Violations in Ethnic Areas

The junta's brutal campaign in ethnic areas continues, and has extended to urban and "dry zone" areas with a majority Bamar population in Sagaing and Magway region.

Fighting has escalated in Rakhine State and southern Chin State, **displacing 17,400 people** during August and September. A month long battle continues between Ethnic Armed Organisations and the junta in the area between Karreni/ Kayah and Shan States has left thousands displaced.

Fighting and surveillance has increased in Tanintharyi region. WLB member organizations report an increase in Pyu Saw Htee controlled security checkpoints. Women are fearful to pass the security gates as the Pyu Saw Htee sexually assault women when they try to pass. There are limitations on the quantity of rice an individual can transport, being limited to 5kg. This has increased the delay of delivering aid to IDPs.

The number of IDPs has now reached **1.3 million**. At a moment's notice, villagers have to flee their homes when the military junta attacks their village. Women who are pregnant, the elderly, or women who have physical disabilities are unable to run and hide. Many are left behind and are subsequently killed by junta's soldiers.

The number of international donors supporting IDPs with food has decreased, and many **IDPs are experiencing hunger**. Farmers who have been displaced are faced with a difficult choice of returning to the conflict zone or sacrificing their crops; their only form of livelihood. The price of rice, the staple of the Burma/ Myanmar diet, has increased by 45%, while the price of palm oil has tripled. Fuel prices have also significantly increased which has had an impact on prices/affordability of goods, travel, and the cost of agriculture.

IDP camps are old and many are in very poor condition, leaving many IDPs without adequate shelter. **Illness and disease** are increasing, especially in IDP camps where illnesses can spread quickly and people find it difficult to access clean drinking water and water to maintain personal hygiene.

There has been a decrease in the amount of women's hygiene products from donors and humanitarian agencies, making it difficult for women to remain clean and healthy. Women continue to face significant risk and disadvantage, which has increased the number of young women getting married early and having unwanted pregnancies.

### CHIN STATE

The junta continues to lay landmines, and launch airstrikes and heavy artillery attacks in southern Chin State, particularly in **Paletwa township**.





On August 15, junta shelling claimed the life of a **59-year old Hakha woman** as she was cooking rice in her kitchen. In Paletwa township on August 25, a 43-year old woman was **killed by a landmine** when she was out searching for her husband. Two teenagers were **abducted** in a raid by the junta on Hairual village and found dead near the Mizoram border. The teenagers are believed to be the children of a local PDF commander.

Key roads and waterways have been blocked, **restricting movement** of civilians and preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching people in need. Local and international humanitarian organisations have been unable to deliver life-saving provisions to the IDPs. A ship carrying essential goods usually runs between Chin and Rakhine State once a week, however the conflict has cut off the **flow of goods** to Paletwa.

## ! KACHIN STATE

The junta continues to launch airstrikes and heavy artillery attacks in Kachin State, particularly in Hpakant township. On August 9, junta troops set fire to Sezin village, **burning 700 houses** while villagers were still inside, including two elderly women. The troops shot at anyone who tried to escape, killing around 40 people.

On September 14, 180 junta soldiers arrived at Maden Yang in Lon Khin village. Many residents fled, but around 1000 residents remained trapped. The soldiers **abducted two civilians** and burnt down their grocery shop in Hpakant township. WLB member reported, a 30-year old woman in Oo Pyit Village, Myitkyina, was killed by the junta for no apparent reason. The soldiers took her family members' phones and forbade them to leave. On September 23 in Ka WarYan Village, Moe Kaung Township, a woman with mental health issues was shot to death by junta soldiers.

The economic insecurity faced by women has forced many to move to work in jade (?) mining areas. WLB member organization reports that some of the young women have been trafficked. Theft has increased due to the desperation of the economic situation, making it dangerous for women in public spaces. WLB members report that many young people who are internally displaced and cannot go to school, are working for militia groups for money.

## ! KAREN STATE

Fighting in the eastern part of the Dawna Range intensified with **33 clashes** between KNU and the junta forces since the military launched a major offensive in early August. According to Karen National Union, from January 2021 to August 2022 the junta shot 4456 heavy weapons and launched 117 airstrikes on Karen villages and places where people work. The junta have displaced 371,958 people, **killed 131 civilians** and arrested 412 innocent people, among them children, students, people with disability, and the elderly.



Displacement disproportionately impacts women and children. WLB members report numerous incidences in Karen State where women have been forced to **flee while pregnant**, or right after giving birth.

Sexual violence is perpetrated by Burmese Army soldiers; however, they do not get reported as impunity prevails. Crimes that are reported are those perpetrated by community or family members. Due to the complete **breakdown of the justice system**, sexual and gender-based violence is often settled at the community level using traditional customary law, which is often grossly inadequate.

## ! KARENNI/ KAYAH STATE

The junta **killed 322 civilians** in Karrenni / Kayah State since the coup. Among these, 261 were killed after being arrested and 61 died while fleeing their homes.

Fighting increased in Karenni/ Kayah State in the last two months, particularly in Demoso, Peruso and Loikaw. The junta continue to target civilians, destroying houses, places of worship and **medical clinics**. Fighting started on September 2 and remains ongoing in the border area between Shan and Karenni/ Kayah States. Six civilians, including three **children under the age of 10** were killed and 13 others were injured. The junta planted landmines in the area, making it unsafe for villagers to return home when the fighting ceases.

There were **46 clashes** between junta troops and anti-regime forces in the second half of August. The junta launched airstrikes and heavy artillery attacks in Loikaw township, killing five and injuring 15 people. Fighting continued throughout September with over **57 clashes** between junta soldiers and anti-regime forces, killing nine civilians and injuring 19 others. According to WLB member organisation, 13 of the injured civilians were women.

Seasonal diseases such as malaria have increased in mountain areas, however there is a shortage of medicines. In areas that face severe water shortages, people are becoming sick from contaminated water. WLB member organisation reports an increase in domestic violence as a result of the increasing levels of poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues and impunity.

## ! SAGAING REGION

Numerous assaults on communities across Sagaing region have left many casualties, including women and children. On the morning of September 24, junta soldiers set fire to two villages in Salingyi township. They burned down houses and **kidnapped three women** from Thaekawkyi village.

160 junta troops raided the village of Tei Pin Seik village on August 25 after arriving in two batches from three military helicopters. The junta open fired on villagers as they tried to escape, killing nine civilians, including a six-year old. Half of the troops advanced to Ein Chay village and torched 100 homes.

The Burmese army attacked a medical clinic in Kani Township where IDPs were seeking treatment. The troops destroyed almost US\$10,000 of **critical medical supplies**, dumping some into a well and setting fire to the medical equipment. On August 31, two women and an **8-year-old girl** were injured in a junta attack on an IDP camp in Myanung township.

Junta soldiers ransacked buildings and set fire to Pu Tee village, **destroying precious livestock and rice crops**. This was the third attack on Pu Tee village, leaving many villagers too fearful to return home to harvest the remaining crops. In Kanbalu township, a 42-year-old woman and her 12-year-old daughter were killed after stepping on a **landmine** on their way to their farmland.

## SHAN STATE

WLB member organisation reported five cases of gender-based violence during the month of September, including rape, child rape and domestic violence. In the border area of Tachilek city, killings occur every week, however the perpetrators are never charged because of the erosion of the rule of law.

Nearly 30,000 residents were forced to flee the southern Shan State town of Moebye in early September when Junta forces attacked the town. On September 19, 150 junta forces returned to the southern Shan State town of Moebye and many civilians were unable to flee. It is reported that those remaining are being **forced to work** for the junta and are being used as human shields. Those that remain in the town are monks and IDPs sheltering at the Mwe Daw and Set Taw Yar monasteries.

Shelling by junta forces killed four IDPs in Pekhonn township on September 16. Two of the victims, who were among 300 IDPs sheltering at the monastery, were **two sisters aged seven and ten**. Another three children were killed by junta shelling in a town on the **Muse-Kutkai highway**.

## WLB AND MEMBERS' SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

**Burmese Women's Union** conducted education work raising sexual (health) awareness.

**Kachin Women's Association Thailand** provided emergency relief to IDPs, including medicine. KWAT collected data and information, underwent awareness training and taught refugee women skills to earn an income.

**Karenni National Women's Organization** provided food, women's dignity kits, accommodation, to IDP camps. KNWO also supported IDPs with financial support and celebrated International Peace Day in the IDP camps. KNOW provided food and nutrition to pregnant women and children and delivered gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health training.

**Kayan Women's Organization** ran counselling programs and mobile trips in villages and IDP camps. They ran awareness training on landmines and child protection in villages and IDP camps.

**Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization** provided food supplies to IDPs camps and supported pregnant women, people with disabilities, CDM members and WHRDs. Supported survivors of domestic violence with access to safe houses.

**Lahu Women's Organization** engaged in alliance discussions and met with Lahu leaders inside Burma. LWO supported CDM members, WHRD and IDPs.

**Pa-O Women's Union** conducted training on human rights, federalism, transitional justice, and fiscal federalism. PWU collected data on human rights abuses, and provided support CDM members and WHRDs.

**Shan Women's Action Network** supported IDPs who could not return home with rehabilitation.

**Tavoyan Women's Union** underwent human rights documentation and digital security training and psycho-medical first aid training. Tavoyan Women's Organisation provided support IDPs, providing food and essential items.

**Women for Justice** facilitated an online discussion on "Awareness to Decrease Domestic Violence" for women in Sagaing Region. WJ held discussions on "Gender, Types of Violence and Domestic Violence Awareness" with alliance partners from Chin State and Magway division. WJ supported IDPs in Sagaing Region and Chin State with medicine and food. WJ collected information about IDPs and situation updates and distributed these to alliance partners/organisations in Chin State.



## CONCLUSION

The Burma/ Myanmar economy has all but collapsed, leaving the majority of people struggling to meet their basic daily needs, such as food, medicine, and shelter. The 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan is only 20 per cent funded, leaving a gap of **US\$660 million**.

A significant increase in funding is needed to urgently address country-wide food shortages. Cooperating with the junta to deliver life-saving aid has proven to be ineffective. The international community must work with local actors, including ethnic women's organisations, to develop a new humanitarian response plan that draws on their skills, knowledge and ability to deliver aid to their communities. Ethnic women's organisations have decades of experience of delivering humanitarian aid to their community while avoiding any contact and cooperation with the military or its proxies.

In addition, the international community must work with local organisations to mediate with Burma/ Myanmar's neighbouring countries to provide an open and safe humanitarian corridor, so that local aid actors, and women first responders can do their work without disruption or harassment.

The escalation of sexual violence, including gang rape being committed by soldiers must not continue to go unpunished. The known cases of sexual abuse against women are only the tip of the iceberg, given the security issues in reporting and a lifetime of impunity. The junta must be brought to justice for its continual use of rape as a weapon of war. The support of the international community to bring these perpetrators to justice is essential for the wellbeing of survivors and the future of gender equality in Burma/ Myanmar.

## International Community Must



**REJECT MILITARY  
COUP/SO-CALLED**  
State Administrative  
Council



**REFERRAL TO ICC**  
for its crimes against  
humanity



**GLOBAL ARMS  
EMBARGO**

- **SUPPORT** local rights defenders who are providing safe houses/ shelters for peaceful protestors, especially women human rights defenders.
- **SUPPORT** those in the country by ensuring a political space for women's rights organisations and civil society.
- **SUPPORT** our advocacy to end system of impunity for all forms of violence against women and girls including conflict-related sexual violence and sexual assault & sexual harassment in custody.



## WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA

The Women's League of Burma is an umbrella organization comprising 13 women's organization of different ethnic and political backgrounds. WLB was founded on 9 December 1999.

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