

### Army bombards Kachin state

In December the Burmese Army stepped up its attacks in Kachin State, using fighter jets and helicopter gunships to bombard the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) near their headquarters in Laiza, on the border with China. The aerial bombardment was also near camps where an estimated 10,000 internally displaced civilians, forced to flee earlier attacks by the Burmese Army, are sheltering.

The intensified attacks came after the Burmese Army issued a deadline to the KIA to withdraw from some of their positions. The KIA refused to move its troops, saying it was a military threat. President Thein Sein's office initially denied the air attacks but later admitted using airstrikes.

There have been several rounds of negotiations between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the military-backed government. However, the KIO want a commitment for political dialogue before signing a ceasefire. The KIO were on ceasefire for 17 years until the Burmese Army broke the agreement in June 2011. During the years of ceasefire, the promise of political dialogue was never honoured by the regime.

Valerie Amos, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), visited Kachin State during her trip to Burma from 3 – 7 December 2012. She highlighted humanitarian problems resulting from the government's continued blocking of aid. "The UN has not been allowed access to provide badly needed assistance to some 39,000 people in areas outside the Government's control since July 2012. Local partners are providing food and other assistance but their stocks are depleted and with the winter months approaching getting more supplies in is critical," she said.



Fighter jet and helicopter gunship attack in Kachin State.  
House destroyed by helicopter attack on 28 December 2012  
Credit: Free Burma Rangers

### Rohingya IDP camps in Arakan State "among the worst" in world

UN humanitarian coordinator Valerie Amos also visited Arakan (Rakhine) State in December. She described the conditions at one camp in Myebon as one of the worst camps she has seen in the world.

"I have seen many camps during my time as the ERC but the conditions in this camp rank among the worst," she said. "I saw thousands of people in shockingly overcrowded, substandard shelter with poor sanitation. They don't have jobs, children are not in school and they can't leave the camp because their movement is restricted. The situation is dire."

Aid continues to be blocked or restricted by both authorities and local communities. One major aid agency told the BBC that obstruction by the Buddhist community was preventing them from doing 90% of their work. The Burmese army has failed to intervene to ensure aid is delivered.

### U Gambira arrested again

Former political prisoner U Gambira was arrested on 1 December and held in Insein Prison, Rangoon.

He was released on bail on 10 December and is now awaiting trial.

He has been charged with three different counts, including 427 of Damaging the Dignity of the Country, Section 448 of House Trespassing and Section 454 of Lurking House-trespass or House-breaking in order to Commit Offence Punishable with Imprisonment. (The authorities locked U Gambira out of his own monastery but he went in anyway).



U Gambira (aka Nyi Nyi Aung) is one of the monks who led the Saffron Revolution in 2007 and was conditionally released in January 2012. Since his release in January, U Gambira has continued to speak about the ongoing human rights abuses committed by the military-backed government in Burma. This is the third time he has been re-arrested since his conditional release in January.

He was badly tortured while he was in interrogation centres and in prison after being arrested for his role in the 2007 uprising. He was sentenced to 68 years in prison and denied medical treatment even though his health was deteriorating from torture and mistreatment in prison.

He has been suffering from clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder since he was released. He is urgently in need of medical treatment which is not available in Burma, but the government will not allow him to apply for a passport to get treatment abroad. U Gambira's family members are worried that his life might be in grave danger if he doesn't receive proper medication.

### **Copper mine protestors charged**

Following the crackdown in November on the peaceful protest camps at the Letpadaung copper mine in Monywa, north west Burma, activists and Buddhist monks held peaceful demonstrations in various cities to protest about the violent crackdown. The military-backed government has responded by detaining and charging activists who participated in the rallies. Eight activists who were arrested for leading protests in Rangoon were released on bail on 11 December. Further protests were held in mid-December in Mandalay and Monywa.

Eight activists were arrested and charged under the Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law. Two new protest sites have been set up near the Letpadaung Copper Mine.

### **Chin National Front sign agreement with government**

The Chin National Front (CNF) has signed a further agreement with the government, following talks on 7 December. The CNF signed an initial ceasefire agreement in January 2012.

The main points of the agreement included the recognition of Chin National Day, an independent Chin Human Rights Committee, the granting of licenses for community-based media in Chin State, and that the government should inform the CNF one month in advance of any Burmese Army patrols in seven locations in Chin State.

### **Burma sets up transparency committee for extractive industries**

In a step towards greater transparency in its natural resource sector, Burma has appointed a high-level committee to recommend reforms on the governance of its extractive industries.

The Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative Leading Authority will be headed by Soe Thein, a minister in President Sein Thein's office, and is due to report back by the end of 2013 on ways to improve the management and sustainability of Burma's natural resources.

Burma has also agreed to sign the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI), an international group that sets global standards for transparency of payments from natural resources in an effort to limit conflict and corruption.

Burma is still one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Transparency International's latest index on corruption in the public sector has ranked Burma 172 out of 176 countries. Each country is given a ranking from zero to 100 percent in terms of corruption, with zero being the most corrupt. Burma scored just 15 percent, ahead of only Somalia, North Korea, Afghanistan and Sudan.

Speaking at the International Labour Organisation in Geneva in June 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi warned potential investors against investing in the state-owned energy company Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) while it lacks standards. She said, "MOGE, the state-owned company under the Ministry of Energy with which all foreign participation in the energy sector takes place through joint-venture arrangements, lacks both transparency and accountability at present."

## **Swedish weapons used by Burmese Army in Kachin State**

Authorities in Sweden are investigating claims that Swedish weapons have been used by the Burmese Army in attacks against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Kachin State. In early December Swedish journalist Bertil Lintner reported that M-3 Carl Gustav anti-tank weapons, produced by Saab Bofors Dynamics, had been recovered by the KIA after attacks by the Burmese army.

A spokeswoman for Sweden's Agency for Non-Proliferation and Export Controls told the Independent newspaper that an investigation based on the serial number on one of the weapons had found it was part of a larger shipment of arms sold to the Indian government in 2003.

## **British Foreign Office Minister visits Burma with trade delegation**

Hugo Swire MP, the British Foreign Office Minister with responsibility for Burma, visited Burma from 12-15 December, leading a trade delegation of 20 companies.

Burma Campaign UK expressed concern that with so many serious human rights abuses remaining, the British government should make human rights, not trade, its top priority in Burma. Although sanctions have been suspended, very serious human rights abuses remain. Attacks by the Burmese Army against ethnic Kachin civilians continue, hundreds of political prisoners are still in jail, and the situation in Rakhine State remains very tense. Many people have been arrested for organising peaceful protests, and the government is confiscating land from farmers and selling it to big business. There has still not been any Constitutional change to make Burma more democratic.

While in Burma, Hugo Swire had meetings with government ministers and Aung San Suu Kyi, and visited Arakan (Rakhine) state. Following his visit, he said that "progress on human rights issues is crucial to Britain's relationship with Burma."

## **UN General Assembly condemns Burma's violations of international law**

On 24 December the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on the situation of human rights in Burma, its 22nd resolution on Burma.

The resolution welcomed "the positive developments in Myanmar". However, it raised concerns about continuing human rights violations, including "arbitrary detention, forced displacement, land confiscations, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as violations of international humanitarian law".

It called for "a full, transparent and independent investigation into all reports of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law" and for the government of Burma to ratify "international instruments in the fields of human rights, labour law, refugee law and humanitarian law".

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