

Burmese Army attacks Kachin IDP Camps

On 22 October the Burmese Army launched a new military offensive in Kachin State, trapping thousands of villagers and forcing hundreds more to flee.

More than 1,000 soldiers from two battalions attacked the Nam Lim Pa and Mung Ding Pa village tracts areas in Mansi Township, southern Kachin State. An estimated 1,500 internally displaced people (IDPs) were sheltering in Mung Ding Pa, and 2,400 in Nam Lim Pa areas.

The Burmese Army fired small and heavy artillery in the direction of Mung Ding Pa IDP camp and then occupied most of the camp, forcing many of the refugees to flee. Burmese Army soldiers reportedly ransacked and looted homes that the IDPs were sheltering in.



A Kachin IDP camp

The attack violates an agreement made less than a month ago between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the Burmese government.

Jessica Nhkum, joint secretary of the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT), said "Between each round of peace talks, the Burmese government is seizing new strategic sites and expanding its military into Kachin areas. How can we believe that this process will lead to peace?"

Ethnic organisations concerned about military engagement with Burmese military

133 civil society organisations, representing 15 of Burma's ethnic nationalities, have written to US President Barack Obama, UK Prime Minister David Cameron and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott expressing great concern about their proposed military engagement with the Burmese military.

In their joint letter, the organisations called for benchmarks to be met before any military engagement should take place, including:

- Requiring the Burmese military to demonstrate a genuine interest in reform by stopping all attacks throughout the country in both ceasefire and non-ceasefire areas, withdrawing from conflict zones;
- Requiring the Burmese government and the Burmese military to publicly acknowledge that human rights abuses have and continue to be committed by the Burmese military and commit to a zero tolerance policy;

- Requiring the Burmese military to establish, with international support, an independent military police force that will investigate allegations of human rights abuses by soldiers, and the creation of an open judiciary process where such soldiers are given fair trials and sentences.

The organisations said, "The Burmese military does not commit human rights abuses accidentally, out of ignorance, because they do not know any better, or because they are not properly trained.

"Burmese military leadership orders their officers and soldiers to violate human rights in order to control property and resources ... Training junior officers and soldiers does not address the main problem: that soldiers are committing human rights abuses on the orders of their military and political leaders."

Burmese government troops use villagers as human shields in Shan State

According to the Shan Human Rights Foundation, on 13 October Burmese government troops forced 18 villagers to walk between them as human shields while returning to their base, after attacking a Shan ceasefire group in Kunhing in central Shan State.

About 80 Burmese troops from Light Infantry Battalion 150 attacked the Shan State Army-South between 10-12 October, firing mortar shells and causing over 100 people from the village of Paeng Ner to flee their homes. The Burmese troops reportedly told villagers they were in the area to provide security for Chinese companies carrying out gold mining along the Salween River.

Further attacks took place on 26 October when Burmese Army soldiers fired mortar shells at a base of the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S).

The Burmese troops then occupied a nearby ethnic Padaung village and stopped the villagers from leaving the village for three days, children were not even allowed to go to school at a nearby village.

The attacks are in violation of the ceasefire agreement signed between the SSA-S and the Burmese government since December 2011.

56 political prisoners freed

On 8 October 56 political prisoners were released after a Presidential amnesty, including members of ethnic Shan and Kachin armed groups.

As with most other political prisoner releases, they have been released under Article 401, which means their release is not unconditional. If they are arrested again they will serve the new prison sentence and the old prison term which they didn't finish serving will be added to it.

The latest amnesty came on the same day President Thein Sein travelled to Brunei for a meeting of regional and international leaders.

Over the past two years Thein Sein has timed the release of political prisoners before key international moments in order to achieve good public relations.

According to The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), over 200 political activists are awaiting trial. Despite a promise made by President Thein Sein that all remaining political prisoners will be released by the end of the year, the number of political prisoners is significantly increasing.

Aung San Suu Kyi visits Europe

Aung San Suu Kyi made her third trip to Europe, visiting Belgium, Luxembourg, France, UK and Italy from 18 October to 2 November. She collected the Sakharov Prize for 'freedom of thought', which she had been awarded in 1990, at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. While in the UK, she visited Northern Ireland to learn more about the peace process and spoke at Sandhurst military training academy.

She called on the EU to put pressure on the government in Burma to amend the undemocratic Constitution and urged more caution in assessing Burma's progress.

In an interview with the BBC, she said "people assume too readily that we're on the path to democracy, that we're democratizing at a very fast rate, it's nothing like that at all ... we cannot become a democratic society with such a Constitution in place."

She faced criticism for controversial comments she made during the BBC interview about the violence against Muslims in Burma. She appeared to play down the scale of the anti-Muslim violence, denying the attacks against the Rohingya were ethnic cleansing, as Human Rights Watch have reported, and said that "the reaction of the Buddhists is based on fear."

UN Human Rights Rapporteur warns of dangers of "glossing over" human rights abuses

On 24 October, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, presented his latest report to the United Nations General Assembly. In one of his most in-depth reports, Quintana makes an unprecedented 63 recommendations for action needed to improve human rights.

Issues highlighted in the report include:

- Continuing politically motivated arrests and convictions, including individuals involved in land rights protests and human rights defenders in Rakhine State.
- A continued "profound crisis" in Rakhine State and "little evidence that the Government has taken steps to tackle the underlying causes" of the violence.
- The arbitrary detention and imprisonment of many Muslims following village "sweeps" by security personnel after the violence in June and October 2012.

- The “disproportionate and discriminatory restrictions on freedom of movement” for Muslims in Rakhine State.
- The spread of hate speech and “anti-Muslim sentiment”.
- Continuing lack of access for international humanitarian agencies in Kachin State.
- Failure of new laws to meet international human rights standards, including the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act and the draft Association Law.
- Concern that “progress is being reversed” with regard to freedom of opinion and expression, including restrictions in the Printing and Publishing Bill, the failure to repeal or amend the Electronic Transactions Law and the “current requirement that publishers submit all publications to the Copyright and Registration Division for review, following publication.”
- Need for greater involvement by those at the grass-roots level, in particular women, in peace negotiations.
- “No evidence that the judiciary is developing any independence from the executive branch of the Government.”

He highlighted “the dangers of glossing over shortcomings in the area of human rights or presuming that these shortcomings will inevitably be addressed through the momentum of current reforms” and warned that “if these shortcomings are not addressed now, they will become increasingly entrenched in areas such as accountability for human rights violations; the rights of ethnic and religious minorities; the rights to peaceful assembly and association; the representation of women in decision-making positions; land rights; and human rights and development.

“Furthermore, they will eventually undermine the reform process itself if they are not addressed in accordance with international human rights standards.”

US maintains military sanctions on Burma due to child soldiers

The United States has maintained a block on military assistance to Burma because of its use of child soldiers. Burma is one of five countries sanctioned under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA), which places restrictions on security assistance and commercial licensing of military equipment for governments found to use child soldiers.

However, the US has been developing closer military ties with the Burmese Army and is considering military training.

384,000 ‘modern day slaves’ in Burma

A global index on modern slavery has estimated that 384,000 people are modern day slaves in Burma.

The Global Slavery Index 2013, by Walk Free, attempts to measure the scale of the modern slavery problem, and has ranked 162 countries. It found nearly 30 million people are enslaved worldwide, for example through forced labour, victims of human trafficking, forced marriage, debt bondage or even born into slavery.

The report found that “in absolute terms, the countries with the highest estimated numbers of enslaved are India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, Thailand, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Taken together, these ten countries account for more than 76% of the total estimate of 29.8 million enslaved.”

Burma one of the most difficult places in the world to do business

The latest annual ‘Doing Business’ report from the World Bank has found that Burma is one of the most difficult countries in the world to do business in. Overall, Burma was placed 182 out of 189 countries surveyed.

The report assesses areas such as ease of starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, resolving insolvency and employing workers.

Burma was ranked bottom for the ease of starting up a business and one of the lowest for protecting investors and enforcing contracts.

New Reports

2013 report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/A-68-397_en.pdf

Disputed Territory The Human Rights Foundation of Monland

‘Mon farmers’ fight against unjust land acquisition and barriers to their progress.’ The report highlights cases of land confiscation and abuse in Mon areas and the farmers who are pursuing justice.
<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/reports/title/disputed-territory>

**Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession
Law used to arrest and imprison political
activists**

Briefing by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners showing how Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law is being frequently used to arrest and imprison political activists for undertaking human rights activism in Burma.

<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/reports/title/peaceful-assembly-and-peaceful-procession-law>

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