“Red or green, a chili is still spicy”

Villager perspectives on the Burma military regime’s “transition” to a nominally civilian government amidst continued human rights violations in Southeast Burma (April – July 2026)

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KHRG Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

1. Introduction

On 10 April 2026, Min Aung Hlaing[1] installed himself as the president of Myanmar.[2] Just over five years before this in February 2021, he had led an illegal military coup to overthrow the democratically elected government and imprison political opponents, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint. This catalysed major protests across the country that quickly evolved into a nationwide armed struggle against the junta. To date, more than 100,000 people have been killed,[3] 22,859 are held as political prisoners,[4] and the junta only controls about 40% of the country.[5] Despite this, the regime still held three-phase national elections between December 2025 and January 2026. These elections have been widely regarded as neither free nor fair due to widespread reports of voter exclusion, coercion, and intimidation, and the exclusion of opposition parties, especially in ethnic territories.[6]

This highly constrained political environment all but guaranteed that the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the military backed party, would receive the most eligible votes. Their win gave Min Aung Hlaing the legal pathway that he needed to make himself president, all while installing loyalists in the highest military positions, effectively ensuring that he now holds power over both the military and a quasi-civilian government. On 20 April 2026, Min Aung Hlaing proposed peace talks within the following 100 days[7] while going on to declare martial law three days later in towns and townships across Shan, Rakhine, Kachin, Karenni, Karen (Kayin), and Chin States, and Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay Regions.[8] On 31 July 2026, reflecting on his government's first 100 days in office, Min Aung Hlaing stated: *"The government has, since assuming office, accelerated the implementation of its two priority objectives: ensuring national peace and stability and promoting the country's development."*[9] However, documentation collected by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) during this period reveals a different picture.

To better understand villager experiences and perspectives, KHRG conducted 25 interviews with community members across Southeast Burma[10] between June and July 2026, including with villagers, human rights defenders (HRDs), local leaders, schoolteachers, health workers, community-based organisation (CBO) members, a retired Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)[11] commander, and a religious worker.[12] KHRG also reviewed 67 published and unpublished reports (including interviews, incident reports, short updates, and situation updates) covering the reporting period.

Despite outwardly calling for peace talks with armed resistance groups, the Burma Army[13] has continued to commit serious human rights violations including air strikes, shelling, and the burning of houses and villages in locally-defined Karen State.[14] Notably, KHRG documented a significant increase in air strikes during the reporting period, alongside continuing civilian casualties. Villagers interviewed for this briefing paper also reported increased Burma Army military activity following Min Aung Hlaing's installation as president, resulting in greater insecurity, including arbitrary arrests and restrictions on movement. Villagers additionally described significant challenges in their daily lives, including difficulties accessing livelihoods, education, and healthcare, as well as decreasing humanitarian support. This led to widespread hardship across Karen State and further distrust of the new government, including its implementation of the 100-day agenda for peace and development.

This briefing paper presents the security, political, and human rights situations in Karen State between 10 April and 31 July 2026, from Min Aung Hlaing's installation as president to the end of the government's announced 100-day programme. The paper first provides a brief overview of the historical context of peace deals, elections, and ceasefire agreements in Southeast Burma. Next, drawing primarily on interviews with villagers and other documentation collected by KHRG, it presents findings on serious human rights violations committed by the Burma Army during the reporting period, villagers' perspectives on the current political situation and peace talks, and their needs and recommendations for improving the political situation and achieving peace. Finally, it includes a legal analysis of the situation, as well as policy recommendations for international stakeholders.

2. Context

Throughout Burma's history, ceasefire negotiations and peace talks have been consistently used by the military as a tool to consolidate their control throughout the country, rather than to advance durable and positive peace. Although

the military had been attempting ceasefires and peace talks since nearly the beginning of colonial independence, 1989 marked the first of a series of bilateral ethnic ceasefires across the country.[15] While these (mostly) resulted in end to open conflict in the territories where they were agreed, human rights violations by the Burma Army against civilians continued throughout this ceasefire era and into the "democratic opening" of 2011-2021. Villagers were forcibly relocated from their villages and subjected to abuses such as forced labour, forced recruitment, sexual violence, and extortion.[16] Moreover, the end to open conflict enabled a "ceasefire capitalism" to flourish, resulting in exploitative resource extraction that destroyed the environment and villagers' livelihood access while further militarising ethnic territories.[17]

Because the Karen National Union (KNU)[18] refused these negotiations while other armed groups increasingly entered into ceasefire agreements, the Burma Army was able to consolidate their resources into offensives in Karen territory. This resulted in significant displacement of villagers and eventually brought the KNU to the negotiating table, where they entered into a "gentlemen's agreement" in December 2003 to end fighting. However, this ceasefire created space for the military to increasingly militarise Karen State, resulting in a resumption of fighting between the KNU and the Burma Army in 2005.[19]

In 2012, the KNU entered bilaterally into a preliminary ceasefire with the central government before signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)[20] in 2015. Simultaneously, as Burma underwent its democratic transition at this time, foreign development and investment increased significantly. As had happened during the previous ceasefire eras of the 1990s and early 2000s, this period was marred by exploitative development used by the military to increase their control over ethnic territory via land confiscations, forced labour, and increasing militarisation.[21] Moreover, as the NCA and other bilateral ceasefire agreements of this time failed to address the political grievances and demands of the ethnic nationalities, conflict continued to occur in ethnic areas throughout the democratic transition.

Now, after five years of nationwide conflict, international sanctions, and pariah status among international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), this military regime has become increasingly desperate for international recognition as Burma's legitimate authority. To do so, they are creating an illusion of concessions through acts such as holding elections (that were neither free nor fair), giving proof of life of Aung San Suu Kyi (without any indication that she or other political prisoners will be released in the near future),[22] and inviting various armed groups into peace talks with the newly created National Solidarity and Peace-making Central Committee (60% of which are under international sanctions for human rights violations).[23] For some countries, this has been enough to justify increasing formal and informal diplomatic engagement with the regime.

Notably, all armed groups that were invited to these peace talks were either already allied with the military or already in a bilateral ceasefire agreement.[24] Key resistance actors, such as the KNU and the National Unity Government (NUG),[25] among others, were not meaningfully invited to engage in dialogue during the 100-day period.[26] The Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF)[27] – a unifying body comprised of nine major resistance actors across the country, none of which have been invited to peace talks – have made their position regarding the military's peace plan clear in a statement released after meeting with ASEAN representatives in Bangkok in July 2026. They stated that meaningful dialogue cannot occur without genuine political will that is demonstrated by an end to air strikes on civilians and civilian targets, release of all political prisoners, and unhindered access to humanitarian aid. Without this, the SCEF stated that meaningful engagement between resistance actors and the military is impossible.[28]

Given their historical struggle and the ongoing violence, villagers interviewed for this briefing paper made clear that they did not trust the regime's recent actions to usher in an era of durable peace. Instead, it is far more likely that these actions are being taken to consolidate the military's control and create a façade of legitimacy that will give other international governments the justification they need to re-engage the military as a government.

3. Factual summary: security, political, and human rights situations

Min Aung Hlaing has sought to portray the new administration as bringing stability, peace, development, and democratic governance.[29] However, villagers' accounts and KHRG documentation instead reveal that since he installed himself as president, conditions have largely worsened or remained seriously insecure.

Interviewee testimony and KHRG documentation indicate that serious human rights violations (3.1.) have continued, including air strikes, which more than doubled during the reporting period (10 April – 31 July 2026) compared to the preceding 113-day period. Villagers also described increased militarisation and travel restrictions, alongside serious impacts on livelihoods, education, and healthcare (3.2.). Regarding villager perspectives (3.3.) on the current political situation and prospects of peace, interviewees overwhelmingly expressed that the installation of Min Aung Hlaing as a "civilian" president and the ensuing peace talks were performative efforts to legitimise and consolidate military rule and weaken resistance. They envisioned an end to conflict and military dictatorship, greater unity and access to rights across Burma, and improved security and daily life. Interviewees also expressed frustration with the international response and called for stronger pressure on the Burma Army, restrictions on weapons and aviation fuel, non-recognition of the new government, and increased humanitarian assistance to civilians.

3.1. Human rights violations related to direct violence and conflict

> *"Min Aung Hlaing established the new government, but in my village, air strikes and shelling happened more frequently. That was the change that happened within my village."*
>
> – Saw[30] A---, a villager from Mu Traw (Hpapun) District[31]

Following the establishment of Min Aung Hlaing's new government, villagers in Karen State continued to face serious human rights violations, including air strikes, shelling, arson, arbitrary arrest, and other forms of violence, amid increased militarisation. KHRG's documentation indicates that the situation not only remained insecure but deteriorated in several respects, resulting in casualties, destruction, displacement, fear, and other harms to local communities.

3.1.1. Air strikes and shelling

Air strikes were reported as the most pervasive security concern across the interviews, with 12 interviewees explicitly reporting an increase in air strikes following Min Aung Hlaing's inauguration. KHRG has received documentation of 139 air strike incidents that occurred during the reporting period,[32] which is more than double the 55 incidents documented during the preceding 113-day period (18 December 2025 – 9 April 2026), and the 52 incidents documented during the corresponding period in 2025 (10 April – 31 July). Civilian casualties likewise increased, with 202 civilians reportedly killed or injured during the reporting period, compared to 100 during the preceding period and 93 during the corresponding period in 2025. Among the casualties documented between 10 April and 31 July 2026, at least 16 children were killed and 16 injured.

Saw I---, a former KNLA commander from Mu Traw District, described the far-reaching impacts of increased air strikes on villagers' daily lives, reflecting a recurring theme across interviews: *"It is getting worse [after the new government was established] because their [Burma Army] aircraft*



This photo was taken in May 2026 in Ye--- village, Noh T'Kaw village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. On 24 May 2026, a Burma Army fighter jet dropped two 500-pound bombs on Ye--- village, killing three villagers, injuring two others, and destroying three houses, a restaurant, and a car. The photo shows the destruction caused by the Burma Army air strike, with smoke still rising from the debris. *[Photo: KHRG]*



This photo was taken on 23 July 2026 in Yc--- village, Klaw Hta village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. On 12 July 2026, a Burma Army fighter jet and Y-12 aircraft dropped four 500-pound bombs on Yc--- village. The air strike injured four villagers and killed and injured livestock, such as cows. It also destroyed three houses and damaged 13 others, along with other property, including a rice barn and motorbikes. The photo shows one of the houses destroyed by the Burma Army air strike. *[Photo: KHRG]*

conduct more air strikes in civilian areas. As a result, villagers have more fear and concerns about their safety and security. So, they are afraid to live in their villages, and they have to flee from their villages. Children are also unable to go to schools in the villages. In the past, children were able to go to schools [in some areas]. [...] Villagers are afraid to live in their villages and villagers do not feel safe to travel for work and their livelihood."

In the week immediately following Min Aung Hlaing's inauguration (10–16 April), the Burma Army conducted at least 22 air strikes across Karen State, notably 12 in Mu Traw District, including an attack on a displacement site.[33] These attacks killed six people and injured 34 others including children, and damaged or destroyed 130 civilian buildings, including homes, schools, clinics, and religious buildings, and killed livestock and damaged other personal belongings.

KHRG documentation and interviewee accounts also demonstrate notable air strike tactics during the reporting period, such as the use of multiple aircraft to conduct air strikes against individual villages.[34] Saw Y---, a local HRD from Mu Traw District, explained: *"In April 2026 after Min Aung Hlaing became president, they [the Burma Army] conducted air strikes in Zz--- village [Kheh Pa village tract,[35] Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District]. As far as I know, three or four fighter jets came and dropped bombs. Each fighter jet dropped at least one 500-pound bomb. They also dropped many other bombs. It happened on the same day. Almost everything in the village was destroyed. More than ten villagers were killed or injured. I think at least three or four villagers were killed. […] We don't know why the Burma Army used many aircrafts and conducted air strikes in this village on the same day. There were no soldiers in the village. There was no fighting in the area."*[36]

KHRG also documented repeated air strikes on at least 14 villages over short periods, including consecutive-day attacks and renewed attacks after brief intervals. Five of these villages were in Mu Traw District and four were in Taw Oo (Toungoo) District. For example, Ya--- village, Way Htoo village tract, Daw Hpah Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) Township, Taw Oo District, experienced frequent Burma Army air strikes during June 2026, with notable attacks on 17 and 18 June, alongside shelling and the burning of villagers' houses and property. These attacks occurred amid fighting between the Burma Army and the People's Defence Force (PDF)[37] in the area from 4 to 29 June.

"There is no safety and security for us," explained U[38] D---, a village authority from Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District. *"We always worry and fear. […] We feel worried and fearful because we don't know when they [the Burma Army] are going to conduct air strikes into our village. They [the Burma Army] often conducted shelling into our village. Mortar shells landed in a village monastery and in proximity to the village. So, we don't feel safe and secure living in the village."* Of the 13 shelling incidents documented by KHRG during



KHRG received this photo from a local villager on 29 July 2026. On 13 July 2026, at 9:30 am, a Burma Army Y-12 aircraft dropped ten 120 mm mortars in Yf--- village, Ler Klah village tract, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. Due to the bombs' explosions, two women villagers were hit and killed. The explosion also destroyed two houses and a community stage where people were gathering for singing. Due to the air strike, the villagers fled to other places for safety. The photo shows the body of one of the two women who were killed by the air strike. *[Photo: Local villager]*

the reporting period, eight occurred alongside or following an air strike.

3.1.2. Increased militarisation and Burma Army presence

Villagers reported an increase of Burma Army presence in their daily lives, generating greater fear and a sense of being watched or controlled. This included a greater presence within villages as well as increased risks while travelling.

a. Increased Burma Army presence in villages

Twelve of the 25 interviewees described fear and insecurity caused by Burma Army soldiers entering or passing through villages, conducting military operations, and establishing a presence in and around villages. Even basic Burma Army presence is often understood as a threat to safety because any encounter with Burma Army soldiers can lead to arbitrary deprivation of liberty and further human rights abuses.[39] One local HRD, Naw[40] Z---, from Mergui-Tavoy District, reported: *"Before, they [the Burma Army] didn't come frequently. In the past, they only travelled through villages that they must travel through. But now, they intrude into villages which have nothing to do with them. Only villagers live in villages. So, their intrusions have caused a greater fear for villagers."*

Burma Army operations in and around villages were also associated with arson and destruction of civilian property. During the reporting period, KHRG documented 18 incidents involving Burma Army burnings, three of which were perpetrated jointly by the Burma Army and the Karen National Army (KNA)[41] and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)[42] in Mu Traw District. In one instance on 17 and 18 June 2026, after a local armed resistance group had, earlier in the month, attacked and captured Swah Ma Gyi army camp in Way Htoo village tract, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District, the Burma Army burned more than 500 villagers' houses as well as villagers' rice paddies in Yb--- and Ya--- villages, Way Htoo village tract (in the same operations discussed above in which the Burma Army conducted air strikes on Ya--- village). At the same time, the Burma Army also conducted air strikes and shelling in the area, and thousands of villagers were displaced as a result.

Naw H---, a member of the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO)[43] from Mu Traw District, directly contrasted these incidents with the political change promised by the new administration: *"If we say, 'Min Aung Hlaing became the president and wanted to make things change', it was not like that in reality, and because of that, we have to be afraid and have to flee into the jungle and have to live under the shade of trees and bamboo trees. For the civilians, they [the Burma Army] came and burned our houses, villagers' houses, and [these things] just happened after he became the president. Due to the burned villagers' houses, and the civilians having to be displaced more and more, how is he going to make a change?"*

During the reporting period, KHRG also documented five incidents in which Burma Army soldiers fired at civilians, including killing a child. Theft and looting, physical violence, and the destruction of civilian property, including items villagers rely on for their livelihoods, such as farming equipment, was also reported. In one incident on 21 June 2026, around 50-60 Burma Army troops entered a farming area





These photos were taken in June 2026 in Yi--- village, Htee Day village tract, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. On 24 April 2026, the Burma Army entered Yi--- village and burnt down villagers' houses while conducting a military operation. As a result, villagers were afraid to live in the village and had to displace to other places. The photos show the remains of villagers' houses burnt down by the Burma Army in Yi--- village. *[Photos: KHRG]*

in Yay Leh village tract, Moo (Mone) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. When the soldiers saw the farmers, they opened fire, causing the villagers to flee. The soldiers then burned 15 farm huts, eight carts, two motorbikes, farming tools, food, and other belongings, resulting in significant livelihood losses and displacement. There was no fighting happening in the area at the time. Destruction of villagers' property, such as food and vehicles, is a well-documented tactic in the military's 'four cuts' strategy to cut off resistance forces from food, funds, recruits, and information that disproportionately harms villagers.[44]

b. Increased risks and restrictions on civilian movement

Risks and restrictions affecting civilian movement were described by 14 of the 25 interviewees. Interviewees reported fear of arrest and forced recruitment, restrictions at checkpoints, onerous documentation requirements, and encounters with Burma Army soldiers while travelling. Saw L---, a village head Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District, explained: *"Of course, since they [the Burma Army] established the new government, we need to be in fear while travelling. Because if we [villagers] encountered them during travelling, they arrested villagers. They arrested children [young people] and sent them to the army. Everything became frightening. We do not feel safe in our travels. We have to travel according to the time. If we look at the situation, whether we are in urban areas or rural areas, we have to be afraid of them. Actually, this new armed group [of the new government] needs to change in better way. But it is still the same and even worsens. Although they changed to a new armed group, the vine is the same."*

i. Arrest and forced recruitment risks

During the reporting period, incidents of arbitrary arrest doubled and victims increased six-fold. KHRG documented 15 incidents of arbitrary arrest involving 66 people, including one incident where six men and one boy were forcibly disappeared, compared to seven incidents involving nine people during the corresponding period in 2025. Compared to the preceding 113-day period, during which KHRG documented 12 incidents involving 30 people, the number of incidents increased by 25%, while the number of victims more than doubled.[45] KHRG also documented four incidents of forced recruitment involving five people during the reporting period. Interviewees and previous KHRG reporting indicate that the Burma Army often arrests local villagers for being without documents legally recognised by the military, via baseless accusations of supporting local armed groups, and for forced recruitment.[46] Saw W---, a local HRD from Taw Oo District, reported: *"Right now, the conscription law [is being used] and many people have also been arrested for forced recruitment. Because of that, if we go to Toungoo Town, there are [checkpoints] at Lay Maing [Four Miles] and Ngar Maing [Five Miles] and people used to get arrested there. […] In our areas, before he became the president, there were a few arrests, but after he became the president and within this year, it seems like the arrests increased."*

ii. Checkpoints and administrative restrictions on movement

Ten interviewees described increasing restrictions associated with checkpoints, road closures and documentation requirements. For example, Saw M---, a local HRD from Kler Lwee Htoo District, explained: *"After Min Aung Hlaing became the president, checkpoint gates remained the same; however, there are some gates that totally forbid civilians to cross. They totally shut the road. So, when they close the road, civilians are afraid to pass the road. Villagers must avoid using the road [and use an alternative road]. So, the checkpoints remain the same, but they totally shut down the road."*

Some villagers also reported increasingly burdensome documentation requirements making travel more difficult. Naw Z---, a local HRD from Mergui-Tavoy District, reported: *"In the past, we were able to travel with travel documents. But now, we can no longer travel with [just] travel documents. Now, we must have a travel recommendation document, a smart card, and a Myanmar ID card. So, now, I am not able to travel anywhere. […] If they [villagers] travel without documentation, they end up paying money. […] Some were charged 30,000 kyats[47] and some were charged 50,000 kyats.[48] That amount is for one gate. There are three to four gates to cross when villagers are traveling. […] Now, I cannot travel far. In the past, I could travel to Tavoy [Town]. But now, I cannot. It is not okay just to be able to travel near this area."* She also described the fear she felt when encountering Burma Army soldiers while travelling: *"In April [2026], I went to towns. [Before April 2026,] I used to travel to towns, like Lay Nya [Town]. But now, when Burma Army soldiers travel, they travel through villages. When they were in villages, how could I feel safe? When I travelled, I brought my phone. I had to hide my*

phone when I travelled. When I saw them, my hands and legs were trembling. I felt like that."

3.2. Human rights violations related to lack of governance

> *"There was no big change in a good way, only in a bad way, just like I had said; they [the Burma Army] will use violence [against] us, increase the killing of people, and increase human rights violations. But for the changes that will occur in a good way and for development, we can say there will be none."*
>
> – Naw H---, a KWO member from Mu Traw District

When discussing current challenges, interviewees repeatedly returned to difficulties affecting everyday civilian life, particularly high prices and difficulties earning a living, education and healthcare. While many of these challenges pre-dated Min Aung Hlaing's self-installation as president, villagers expressed frustration and hopelessness that the new government had brought little improvement to these conditions. In contrast, Min Aung Hlaing has portrayed 2026 as *"a year capable of achieving the durable and stable peace that all citizens desire, as well as a year in which the social and economic lives of all ethnic communities can flourish."*[49] For some villagers, the lack of improvement in livelihoods and education directly shaped how they assessed the government itself. As Naw Z--- explained: *"Actually, when a new government is formed, it must bring changes in the community: opportunities in economy and education. So, if there were no changes, how could one recognise it as a legitimate government?"*

Livelihood and economic challenges were among the most frequently raised concerns, mentioned by 20 of the 25 interviewees. Some interviewees reported worsening economic pressures during the reporting period, including rising prices for basic goods. Daw[50] N---, a villager from Doo Tha Htoo District, explained: *"In my view, civilians are in difficulties with the 100-day project. Now, [the price of] rice, oil, salt, fishpaste, onion, and garlic [has increased]. The price of an egg is 700 kyats.*[51] *As a housewife, I have been struggling a lot. As a woman, I have to collect empty water bottles and empty beer bottles in a boat and sell them. I am really dissatisfied."* Beyond broader economic pressures, villagers described how insecurity and Burma Army attacks directly restricted their ability to work and sustain their livelihoods. Air strikes and shelling created particular risks for villagers working on farms and plantations, while fear of attacks also restricted travel for work. Daw E---, a school headmistress from Dooplaya District, said: *"I heard that he elected himself as a president; it is difficult to do business. Just like this, even if we do business, it is hard to travel because we need to be afraid of aircraft. Also, some of the villagers, they experienced air strikes during their travelling for business."*

Education was similarly prominent, raised by 19 of the 25 interviewees. Villagers described school closures due to fear of attacks, teacher shortages, inadequate materials, relocation and destruction of schools, displacement, and disruptions to teaching caused by Burma Army air strikes. These challenges affected children's ability to study consistently and, for some interviewees, raised concerns about whether children would be able to complete their education and what this would mean for their futures. Naw K---, a schoolteacher from Doo Tha Htoo District, described the consequences for children: *"Schools were supposed to open, but they could not because of the conflict. This became a big problem for the students. Some children had to move to other places, while others could not attend school at all. Because of the war, many students had to stop their education. Those who were afraid could not continue studying, and those who stayed in school had to study in fear."* Several interviewees also reported that schools were unable to open for the 2026-2027 academic year due to insecurity and fear of air strikes. Saw Y---, a local HRD from Mu Traw District, reported: *"After the election, and Min Aung Hlaing becoming the president, the situation got worse compared to the past in Mu Traw District; there is an increase in air strikes. At the moment, in Mu Traw District, at least around 10 to 20 schools are unable to run and be reopened, because lately, the number of bombing incidents have increased."*

Finally, 11 interviewees reported healthcare challenges. Their accounts highlighted both gaps in available healthcare and barriers to accessing it, particularly insecurity when travelling due to the Burma Army's presence. Naw C---, a local health worker from Taw Oo District, described: *"In my experiences related to health care, I have seen many patients, such as mothers of*



This photo was taken in May 2026 in a forest in Maw Taw village tract, T'Naw Th'Ree (Tanintharyi) Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. On 14 May 2026, a Burma Army fighter jet conducted an air strike on Yj--- village, Maw Taw village tract. The air strike killed a husband and wife, and it also damaged or destroyed villagers' houses and plantations. The photo shows villagers from Yj--- village fleeing into the forest after the incident. *[Photo: KHRG]*

newborn babies, children suffering from vomiting or diarrhoea, and mothers of newborn babies bleeding. Those people needed more medicine. However, we did not have enough medicine in our village. So, I needed to find and collect medicine from another village. I looked after the mothers of newborn babies or children as much as I could. [We] do not have enough things to do more." Saw Y--- described similar challenges in Mu Traw District and explained how displacement compounded them: *"In healthcare, numbers of people infected by flu have increased. Villagers live [displaced] in groups. So, it is hard for doctors to look for [many groups] because there are only a few doctors. Sometimes, medicine is inadequate. That increased the difficulties between the organisation [medicine distribution team] and the civilians."* Naw C--- also described the dangers of travelling to access healthcare, recounting an incident where seven villagers were stopped on the road by the Burma Army while going to pick up a patient: *"The Burma Army asked them to get out of the car. Their hands were tied up with rope. One of the villagers was told not to say anything, but that uncle [villager] said, 'We have to pick up the patient, so let us go.' They did not let that uncle go. They tortured and punched his face. They pushed his face on the ground with cement. That uncle's face and forehead were bruised. Therefore, it is not safe for our travel regarding the healthcare or at nighttime."*

3.3. Villager perspectives

Throughout the interviews, villagers shared their perspectives on the current political situation, including their views on why the Burma Army has intensified its military activities and human rights violations while saying they want peace talks. They also described what peace means to them, their visions for Burma's political future, and their recommendations and requests to the international community.

3.3.1. Perceived efforts by the Burma military regime to regain and consolidate control

Worsening abuses and increasing military activity by the Burma Army after Min Aung Hlaing installed himself as president were explained by villagers as efforts to regain or consolidate control, weaken resistance, and undermine civilian support for the resistance. Naw H--- from Mu Traw District linked this perceived objective to changes in military strategy, particularly an intensification of air strikes, including on civilian areas: *"After they [the Burma Army] announced that [there was a new president], they wanted to retake it [the places that they have lost]. So, they changed the strategy of attack, and we have seen that they made it strong in, like, air strike bombing, and if it did not reach this place, it reached that place [they bombed civilian areas indiscriminately]."*

Saw T---, a local HRD from Doo Tha Htoo District, similarly described increased Burma Army violence against villagers as part of efforts to weaken the resistance, despite the military's repeated calls for peace talks: *"They [the Burma Army] want to eliminate resistance groups. They want to weaken their opponents. That is why I think they increase violence against people. […] They did it in the past [in my area], but it was not a lot. After he [Min Aung Hlaing] became president, the violence has increased. Especially, air strikes have increased in our area. The situation is getting worse."*

Saw M---, a local HRD from Kler Lwee Htoo District, reported how the Burma Army uses threats and violence to expand its economic control: *"In my opinion, when they control the area, the SAC [State Adminstration Council] dictatorship's power is stabilised. When they control the area, they dominate the civilians. They [the Burma Army] can pull the strings. Civilians living in the SAC-controlled areas are afraid of the SAC. Because they use power and violence. When the Burma Army can threaten*

the civilians, they can create a monopoly in the economy and strengthen their military activities. It will empower their dictatorship."

Saw Y--- from Mu Traw District similarly connected territorial control with perceived economic interests near the Thai border: *"The other thing is that in Mu Traw District, they [the Burma Army] lost most of their soldiers [in battles] on the border of Thailand. When Min Aung Hlaing became the president, he used his power to recapture [gain power] near the Thai border. He wants to build more of a relationship with Thailand, economic-opportunities wise. Thus, [he] increased air strikes and military activities. In my perspective, shelling and air strikes into villages are to gain power."*

3.3.2. Perception of peace talks

> *"Since the 2021 coup, everyone already knows about them [the Burma Army] and what they are going to do. People view them as 'the same kind of beans from the same bin'. So people do not wonder what they are going to do because people can predict what they are going to do."*
>
> – Saw W---, a local HRD from Taw Oo District

Similar to villagers' rejection of the election and new government, villagers viewed the peace talks as a performance by Min Aung Hlaing and the Burma Army to legitimise and consolidate their authority while maintaining military rule. A recurring perception was that the new government and the call for peace talks were a political game that Min Aung Hlaing played to get international recognition and legitimacy. Saw T--- from Doo Tha Htoo District shared his views on the change from military government to one that is nominally civilian: *"He thinks that he will be able to build good relationships with leaders from other countries if he becomes president. He thinks that he will get trust from international communities if he becomes president. He hoped that ASEAN would recognise him as the president of Myanmar. He is responsible for gross human rights violations in Myanmar, but he tries to cover it up. In order for the people in Myanmar and international communities to change their perspectives on who he is, he just changes his position from military leader to president […] I think Min Aung Hlaing proposed the peace talks because he wants to defend his own personal benefits. He does not want to make a genuine peace. He thought that the international community might stop imposing sanctions on Burma if he made peace talks with armed groups. He thought that ASEAN might give him favour if he made peace talks. This is just the game he plays."*

Many interviewees reported distrust in the peace talks due to ongoing armed conflict, violence, and human rights abuses perpetrated by the Burma Army, as well as its decades-long history of proposing peace talks and ceasefire negotiations that result instead in further human rights violations. Saw T--- from Doo Tha Htoo District reported: *"They [the Burma Army] don't care about the peace talks. They do whatever they want to do. They conduct military operations. If they want to conduct air strikes and shelling, they just do it. They often conduct air strikes in our area although they talk about peace discussions. In reality, they could not implement the peace talks."* U R---, a villager from Mu Traw District, similarly explained the contradiction between calls for peace and continuing military attacks: *"I heard about the peace talk. I think people cannot accept the peace talk because this is a fake peace talk. They [the Burma Army] should stop bombing, fighting, and military operations if they really want peace. If they stop it, people will trust them. If there is no fighting, villagers will be able to live and sleep well. Now, villagers are always afraid."*

3.3.3. Understanding of peace

> *"We don't need to understand peace. We need to feel it."*
>
> – U D---, a village authority from Kler Lwee Htoo District

Villagers understood peace as more than an end to conflict and Burma Army abuses, although ending violence remained fundamental. They described sustainable peace as also requiring unity between communities and armed groups, and the ability to live safely, meet their basic needs and exercise their rights.

For 16 interviewees, an end to conflict and violence was fundamental to their understanding of peace. Saw J---, a local HRD from Hpa-an District, reported: *"To me, peace first means that there is no war or fighting in the area. It also means that all*

communities, including different ethnic groups and the various armed actors, can live without conflict, allowing civilians to live safely and securely. Peace means that people can move freely, work, earn a living, and meet their basic needs without fear. When people can fully enjoy their basic human rights and live their daily lives in safety, then I would say the country is truly at peace. In my view, achieving peace requires an end to the fighting and armed conflict. The violence must stop first. After that, the country needs to establish a good and effective system of governance that people can accept and trust."

Fourteen interviewees identified unity as essential for peace, describing mutual support among villagers and cooperation between communities, armed groups, and leaders. Saw W--- from Taw Oo District described a vision of peace through unity, which he understood as showing empathy and helping others: *"It's just to be united and keep unity. For example, a moment when one person empathises with another's suffering and another offers a helping hand and empathises with the other people who have been suffering, and a moment when having a mind that can decide [what is right or wrong], then peace is going to be within arm's reach."* For Naw K--- from Doo Tha Htoo District, peace requires solidarity between different ethnic groups: *"In my understanding, Myanmar is home to many different ethnic groups. Peace means that all of these ethnic groups come together, work hand in hand, respect one another, and help lead the country together. If that happens, it will be good for all of us, and there will be no more fighting. That is my opinion."*

For 15 interviewees, an end to fighting alone was not enough to achieve peace. They also viewed improvements in development, security, and freedom, including better access to livelihoods, education, healthcare, movement, and protection, as essential for meaningful and lasting peace. As Saw T--- from Doo Tha Htoo District explained: *"Peace should not be fake. It must be genuine and sustainable peace. There will be peace if we don't have any concern about our security, livelihood, education, healthcare, etc. There will be peace if we have freedom of speech. If we want to share our opinions or if we don't like something, we should be able to speak it without any barrier and threat. Otherwise, there won't be peace."* Some expressed the belief that peace could never be realised without the enjoyment of all basic rights, which they described as interlinked. Saw P---, a villager from Mu Traw District, said: *"For me, peace means rights. Rights to travel and work in peace. Having rights to have our own organisations and our own leaders who will lead us in the right way."*

3.3.4. Political vision

Villagers had concrete visions for Burma's political future. Across the interviews, there were consistent calls for an end to military dictatorship, including reform of the 2008 Constitution, calls for government that improves civilian's security and daily lives, and greater recognition of ethnic political rights.

Several interviewees expressed their wish for a government led by civilians and an end to military rule. Saw Y--- said: *"All ethnic [groups] are absolutely not accepting the actions of Min Aung Hlaing and his new government. The best [case scenario] is that they [the Burma Army] give up their seats and let the country be governed by a government elected by the civilians. Only then can Myanmar's politics be beautiful. If it [the current political situation] continues like this, the history of Myanmar will not be good to see."* Daw N--- from Doo Tha Htoo District emphasised: *"As long as a cruel and evil military rules the country, there is no hope that our country will get better."*

Five interviewees discussed constitutional change as essential to peace and democracy in Burma, as the 2008 Constitution entrenches the Burma Army's political power and gives it an effective veto over key constitutional amendments,[52] hindering meaningful political change. Saw G---, a villager from Dooplaya District, argued that without constitutional change, political change would remain superficial and military power would continue:

> *"If the 2008 Constitution is not changed, then even if there is a call for change, nothing will happen. They are simply a group of people who took off their military uniforms, put on civilian clothes, and took power. Therefore, their purpose is not change."*

Villagers also emphasised the importance of local authorities maintaining relationships with their communities. Saw Q---, a farmer from Mu Traw District, explained: *"As I mentioned before, our area leaders may not have enough resources to provide food or financial support. What we need most is*

for them to come to our communities, organise us, explain things clearly, and encourage us." This relational dimension also extended to political dialogue at the local level as described by Naw C---, a villager from Taw Oo District: *"I need the local authorities to visit us once a week or once a month. I want to share the challenges in our area with them. They should inform us or provide support with medicine, health workers, and transportation."*

For some interviewees, peaceful political dialogue also required greater recognition of ethnic rights and mutual respect between groups. S---, a villager from Mergui-Tavoy District, said: *"They should discuss with each other and find solutions in a democratic way. There are many ethnic groups in Myanmar. For example, Bamar people should respect Karen people. Karen people should respect Bamar people. If we respect each other, there will be peace. Now, the Burma Army does whatever they want to do. They don't care about others."*

3.3.5. Requests for international pressure

Interviewees expressed consistent dissatisfaction with the international community's response to the situation in Burma and the suffering of civilians. Naw B--- from Taw Oo District contrasted repeated international statements with the absence of visible change: *"When I watched news on social media, we saw they were talking about this. But I am not sure if they do it in action or not. […] They announced it, but nothing happens effectively yet. We heard that they speak with their mouth, but we do not see any change yet."*

The most consistently raised request, mentioned by 12 interviewees, was for stronger international pressure on the Burma Army and Min Aung Hlaing to stop violence and human rights abuses against civilians. Saw V---, a local HRD from Dooplaya District, expressed: "*I hope the international community, especially the United Nations and other international organisations, will take stronger action and put more pressure on those responsible for the violence in Myanmar. Please do not ignore what is happening."* Saw G--- from Dooplaya District also said: *"Yes. I want to say: put pressure on them until international countries can see that this group [the Burma Army] has oppressed the civilians. They [the Burma Army] do not love democratic ideology. International countries should not maintain a friendship with them in the future."*

Other interviewees also called for more active international intervention to prevent recognition of the Burma Army's non-democratic elections and facilitate a new, genuine election free from military control. As Saw T--- explained: *"I want the UN not to recognise the elections, run by the Burma Army. I want the UN to remove the Burma Army from the elections. I want the UN to facilitate issues in order to create a new and genuine election in Myanmar. I want the UN to pressure China and Russia not to support the Burma Army. The Burma Army depends on China and Russia, which are very powerful countries. So, I want these powerful countries not to support the Burma Army as well."* Saw T--- was one of eight interviewees who explicitly raised concerns about support provided by China and Russia to the Burma Army.

Others also called on the international community to take further action to restrict the Burma Army's international travel and business cooperation. Saw W--- from Taw Oo District said: *"If the international community takes action on President Min Aung Hlaing and the organisation related to the military regime by not endorsing them, and if there is more action taken, from their side, they will get to see the right things, and if they can join back with civilians, things will go better for the civilians. […] For the action taken, like restricting – not being able to go to countries, business flows, and other ways that money can flow – if they take more action and restrict it more, I think it will be better."*

Moreover, four interviewees shared their demands for the international community to refuse legitimisation of Min Aung Hlaing's presidency, believing that recognising the Burma Army's institutions amounts to endorsing its human rights violations. As Saw W--- explained: *"Why I thought that is because what he has done is so many things, like killing and air strikes, so I think the overseas countries will also see what is happening [in Burma]. If a person kills many people just to sustain his power, and if the other countries recognise it [that person], it would be like supporting the killer, so [I think] not many of them [the overseas countries] would accept or recognise it."*

3.3.6. Views on humanitarian assistance

Many villagers in Karen State are not only facing human rights abuses but are also struggling to meet their basic needs. Interviewees raised concerns about the worsening humanitarian crisis following Min Aung Hlaing installing himself as president and appealed for increased international assistance. Saw O---, a missionary from Mu Traw District, explained: *"[About] the problems related to healthcare, education, and food, I want*

the international stakeholders to help us solve the problems. Let's say provide support for us. Education is important. Healthcare is important. Staple food is also important. If we have enough of these three things, we can say half of our challenges are decreasing. So, we really need them."

Moreover, interviewees emphasised that collaboration with the Burma Army for humanitarian assistance should be avoided and that local groups should be worked with instead. As Saw Y--- from Mu Traw District said: *"The other thing is that I want international support to reach the civilians. Do not hold hands with the SAC [Burma Army]. Support from NGOs that work together with the SAC has never arrived to us. If it reaches us, it is very little. If possible, collaborate with armed groups [EAOs] when you want to support. If possible, collaborate with NGOs and INGOs to support and solve civilians' difficulties and challenges."*

Saw V--- from Dooplaya District also requested international mediation to support meaningful peace talks and improve the political situation in Burma: *"Nothing changed. They had peace talks in the past, but they did not talk about peace. It is a kind of nationalism. They did not offer equality. The KNU needed federal democracy. There will be democracy when there is federalism. It is useless to talk without having federalism. For example, if the United States could take action and act as a witness in the discussions, peace talks might become possible. If they just discuss like this [without witnesses], there is no reason to talk."*

4. Legal Analysis

International law imposes obligations on States to refrain from providing weapons and military support where such assistance risks contributing to serious violations of international law. While the Burma military regime bears full legal responsibility for its own conduct – which, indeed, raises serious concerns under international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL), and in some cases may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity – this section focuses on the obligations of other States that continue to provide the Burma Army with such support. This is particularly significant given that villagers interviewed for this report repeatedly identified the role of international support in enabling the abuses and devastation they are experiencing. As Naw Z--- from Mergui-Tavoy District explained: *"It would be great if international stakeholders could do something about importing things that should not be imported. Now, [members of] the international community transport fuel and military weapons into Myanmar. So, it would be great if the international stakeholders put pressure on those who are transporting these things. Because they transport these things to Myanmar, Myanmar is suffering."*

Military support to the Burma Army has been documented and criticised for decades. So too has the way in which this support has facilitated the Burma Army's abuses. Transfers of arms and military support are regulated by a mosaic of international legal obligations intended to prevent States from enabling serious violations of international law. Yet there is substantial evidence that between 2024 and 2026, China, Russia, India, and Belarus continued to provide arms, military training, and technology to the Burma Army.[53] An investigation also found that five Czech-manufactured aircraft were delivered to Burma during this period and subsequently commissioned into the Burma Army Air Force.[54]

The most broadly applicable of these obligations arises under Common Article 1 of the four Geneva Conventions. All States discussed above are required to "respect and to ensure respect" for the Conventions "in all circumstances".[55] The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) considers this to require States to refrain from transferring arms where there is an expectation that the transfer would contribute to violations of IHL. In assessing that risk, the recipient's past and present record is directly relevant. Where such a clear risk exists, the transfer must cease.[56]

Continued military support to Burma may also breach customary international law on State responsibility, which can hold States responsible where they knowingly provide assistance that contributes to another State's violations of international law.[57] The Burma Army's abuses have been extensively documented for decades.[58] States continuing to supply weapons and military assistance can therefore not plausibly claim to be unaware of the circumstances in which that support is being provided. China and Czechia are additionally bound by the Arms Trade Treaty, which prohibits certain transfers where it is known that the weapons would be used to commit international crimes. It also requires States to proactively assess such risks before authorising an export and encourages reassessment as circumstances change.[59]

These obligations must be remembered and upheld in the face of the recent non-democratic elections, which represent another effort by Min Aung Hlaing and the Burma military regime to secure international legitimacy while the devastation imposed on civilians continues unabated. States must not treat the façade of electoral legitimacy as changing the legal position before them. Where international law requires arms transfers and military support to stop, continued support is not merely inconsistent with calls for peace and civilian protection: it is unlawful.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this briefing paper present a very different picture from the one Min Aung Hlaing and his administration have sought to project through the elections, inauguration, and peace talks. Villagers did not describe lives marked by improved security, development, or opportunity. Instead, they continued to face serious difficulties accessing education and healthcare, sustaining their livelihoods, and meeting basic economic needs. These challenges are closely connected to poor governance, but also to direct attacks on schools, healthcare facilities, homes, farms, and other places essential to civilian life.

Even more significantly, villagers described living with persistent fear and insecurity. Air strikes were raised by every interviewee, and KHRG's documentation suggests that the Burma Army intensified its air campaign during the reporting period. Villagers also described an increased Burma Army presence in and around civilian areas, bringing greater fear, restrictions on movement, abuses in villages and while travelling, displacement, and greater difficulty working, studying and accessing essential services.

Against this reality, villagers overwhelmingly rejected the idea that the elections, Min Aung Hlaing's presidency, or the peace talks represented meaningful political change. Saw T--- from Doo Tha Htoo District explained:

> *"He just changes military uniforms, but nothing else changes. His actions and behaviours are the same as before. Whether a chili is red or green, it is spicy."*

This captures a recurring perception across the interviews: the form of government may have changed, but villagers continue to experience the same military power, abuses, and insecurity.

Villagers also described the future they wanted. Their vision of peace meant being able to live without fear, move freely, earn a livelihood, access education and healthcare, exercise basic rights, and live within a political system that recognises ethnic political rights and allows communities to participate meaningfully in their own future. Their message to the international community was equally clear: do not mistake political presentation for meaningful change. Interviewees called on international actors not to legitimise a government and political process that they themselves did not view as genuine, and instead to take meaningful action to reduce the violence they continue to experience.

As Saw Y---, a local HRD from Mu Traw District, stated:

> *"Firstly, my desire and also civilians' desire is: do not recognise the new government which was formed by Min Aung Hlaing. Do not keep contact with them at all. Please pressure them more. If possible, do not provide them any support. […] Do not hold hands with the SAC [Burma Army]. […] The other thing that I want to request from the international stakeholders is to stop providing fuel for aircraft to the SAC and to not support [provide] weapons to them. If possible, if the UN can take action on the SAC, I want the UN to take action on them as soon as possible. This is every civilian's hope."*

6. Recommendations

Decades of evidence collected by KHRG strongly suggests that the Burma military regime – and by extension its allies – is the primary barrier to the realisation of durable and positive peace in Burma. Therefore, we strongly urge the international community to:

- **Publicly condemn and refrain from any action that will legitimise the military regime's "government"**, including political, diplomatic, and economic engagement. All recent actions

taken by the military espoused as a transition to civilian governance – including the elections, presidential inauguration, and proposed peace plan – is only cosmetic and does not indicate an end to military rule.

- Instead, **support and engage local governance actors with demonstrated local legitimacy** – characterised by pre-existing experience, reach, and relationships built on mutual trust – who are already working towards inclusive, democratic governance in Burma that supports human rights, transitional justice, and durable peace.
- **Apply diplomatic pressure on states currently engaging with the Burma military regime**, such as China, Russia, and others, to cease all engagement and stop protecting them from international accountability by blocking UN Security Council action and bypassing sanctions.
- Urgently take action to hold the military regime accountable for atrocity crimes by:
    - Referring the situation of Myanmar/Burma to the International Criminal Court under Article 14 of the Rome Statute, including crimes committed in Southeast Burma, on the basis of the NUG's declaration accepting the Court's jurisdiction under Article 12(3).[60]
    - Holding open briefings and implementing regular reporting requirements at the UN Security Council.
    - Supporting national prosecutors to pursue existing universal jurisdiction cases concerning potential war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, and to open new cases concerning crimes committed in Southeast Burma.
- **Provide financial and technical support to local CSOs and CBOs providing humanitarian aid outside of formal channels** as they have more access to and greater trust from affected populations than many formal aid actors. This also decreases the risk that aid will be co-opted and used for coercion against civilians by the Burma military regime.

Front cover note:

This photo was taken in April 2026 in Zz--- village, Kheh Pa village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. On 15 and 16 April 2026, the Burma Army conducted air strikes on Zz--- village. During the air strike on 15 April, an estimated 110 bombs were dropped. The number dropped on 16 April is unknown. The air strikes killed three villagers and injured 12 villagers including a child. Furthermore, 20 houses were burnt, and almost all houses in the village were damaged. The air strike also destroyed a clinic, a middle school, a school hall, and three church buildings, as well as villagers' property, including 23 motorbikes, three cars, two Starlink devices, and other machinery and equipment. The photo shows houses and villager's belongings burnt during the intense Burma Army air strikes. *[Photo: KHRG]*

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Burma. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrg.org.

Appendix A

For clarity, the Burmese terms used for the districts are provided in brackets upon first usage but do not correspond with the Burma (Myanmar) government administrative divisions.

D#	Name	Location
1	Saw L---	Zk--- village, P'Yah Raw village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District
1	Naw X---*[61]	Zi--- village, P'Yah Raw village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District
1	Naw K---	Zi--- village, P'Yah Raw village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District
1	Daw N---	Zm--- village, Noh M'Kweeh village tract, Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District
2	Bb---*	Za---village, Htee Day village tract, Daw Hpah Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District
2	Naw B---	Zb--- village, Per Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo (Htantabin) Township, Taw Oo District
2	Naw C---	Zc--- village, Kaw Thay Der village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District
3	U D---	Zd--- village, Th'Pyin Hla Hah village tract, Moo special area, Moo (Mone) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District
4	S---	Zr--- village, M'Noh Roh village tract, Ler K'Saw Township, Mergui-Tavoy District
5	Saw A---	Zl--- village, K'Law Hta village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District
5	Saw O---	Zn--- village, Shaw Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District
5	Saw P---	Zo--- village, Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District
5	Saw Q---	Zp--- village, Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District
5	U R---	Zq--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District
5	Naw H---	Zg--- village, Htee Ler Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District
5	Saw I---	Zh--- village, Htee Ler Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District
6	Daw E---	Ze--- village, Noh T'Kaw village tract, Noh T'Kaw (Kyainseikgyi) Township, Dooplaya District
6	Saw G---	Zf--- village, Noh T'Kaw village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District

D#	Human Rights Defender	Location[62]
1	Saw T---	Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District
2	Saw W---	Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District
3	Saw M---	Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District
4	Naw Z---	Ler Mu Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District
5	Saw Y---	Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District
6	Saw V---	Noh T'Kaw Township, Doopaya District
7	Saw J---	Ta Kreh (Paingkyon) Township, Hpa-an District

Endnotes

[1] Min Aung Hlaing, then a Senior General and the Commander-in-Chief of Burma's Armed Forces, seized power in February 2021 in a coup d'etat, overthrowing the quasi-civilian government led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi after her party, the National League for Democracy, won the 2020 elections in a landslide. Following the coup, he has responded to the nationwide resistance with extraordinary brutality while continually rebranding himself and his regime to appeal for legitimacy abroad. He declared himself the Prime Minister of Myanmar in 2021, the Acting President of Myanmar in 2024, and misappropriated the title of President of Myanmar in the non-democratic 2025-2026 elections. Although the regime claims Min Aung Hlaing now holds a civilian position, reports of parliamentary coercion and installation of loyalists in the military strongly suggest that Min Aung Hlaing is not acting as a civilian ruler.

[2] Al Jazeera, "Myanmar's coup leader Min Aung Hlaing sworn in as president", 10 April 2026.

[3] France 24, "More than 100,000 killed in Myanmar since 2021 coup, monitor says", 1 July 2026.

[4] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, "Political Prisoners Post-Coup Dashboard", 3 November 2026.

[5] COAR Global, "Actors and Control Tracker", updated May 2026.

[6] Progressive Voice, *Ballots Without Choice: Electoral Dynamics in Ethnic Areas of Myanmar*, 14 May 2026.

[7] Reuters, "Myanmar president seeks peace talks within 100 days, rebels reject offer", 21 April 2026.

[8] The Irrawaddy, "Myanmar Regime Expands Military Rule Despite Calling for 'Peace'", 24 April 2026.

[9] Global New Light of Myanmar, "President U Min Aung Hlaing Reports on Government's 100Day Progress at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw", August 2026.

[10] In 1989, the then-ruling military regime changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar without consultation from the

people. KHRG prefers the use of Burma because it is more typically used by villagers and since the name change to Myanmar is reflective of the military regime's longstanding abuse of power.

[11] The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

[12] KHRG operates in seven areas in Southeast Burma: Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton), Taw Oo (Toungoo), Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin), Mergui-Tavoy, Mu Traw (Hpapun) and Dooplaya and Hpa-an. When KHRG receives information from the field, it organises data according to these seven areas. These are commonly referred to as 'districts' and are used by the Karen National Union (KNU), as well as many local Karen organisations, both those affiliated and unaffiliated with the KNU. KHRG's use of the district designations in reference to our research areas does not imply political affiliation; rather, it is rooted in the fact that many rural communities commonly use these designations. For clarity, the Burmese terms for these districts are provided in brackets but do not correspond with the Burma (Myanmar) government administrative divisions.

[13] The terms Burma military, Burma Army, SAC, Tatmadaw, and junta are used interchangeably throughout this report to describe the Burma military regime's armed forces. Villagers themselves commonly use Burma Army, Burmese soldiers, or alternatively the name adopted by the Burma military regime at the time —from the 2021 coup to July 2025, the State Administration Council (SAC). On 31 July 2025, the military junta changed its name to the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC).

[14] Karen State, defined locally, includes the following areas: Kayin State, Tanintharyi Region and parts of Mon State and Bago Region. Karen State, located in Southeast Burma, is primarily inhabited by ethnic Karen people. Most of the Karen population resides in the largely rural areas of Southeast Burma, living alongside other ethnic nationalities, including Bamar, Shan, Mon and Pa'O.

[15] TNI, "The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar: Promoting Ethnic Peace or Strengthening State Control?", 20 April 2023.

[16] *See, for instance:* TNI, "Burma: Neither War Nor Peace - The Future Of The Cease-Fire Agreements In Burma", July 2009; KHRG, *Submission to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Summary of Forced Labour in Burma*, August 1997; KHRG, *Shouldering the Burden of Militarisation: SPDC, DKBA and KPF order documents since September 2006*, August 2007.

[17] Kevin Woods, "Ceasefire capitalism: military–private partnerships, resource concessions and military–state building in the Burma–China borderlands", *The Journal of Peasant Studies, vol 38*, 2011.

[18] The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015, following the 2021 coup staged by Burma Army leaders, the KNU officially stated that the NCA has become void.

[19] *See, for instance:* KHRG, *Safeguarding human rights in a post-ceasefire eastern Burma*, January 2012; KHRG, *'Peace', or Control? The SPDC's use of the Karen ceasefire to expand its control and repression of villagers in Toungoo District, Northern Karen State*, March 2005.

[20] On 15 October 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the Karen National Union. It was followed by the adoption of a Code of Conduct by the signatories in November 2015. In February 2018, two additional armed ethnic groups signed the NCA under pressure from the Burma/Myanmar government.

[21] For further information on this, please see: KHRG, *'Development without us': Village Agency and Land Confiscations in Southeast Myanmar*, August 2018; KHRG, *Development or Destruction? The human rights impacts of hydropower development on villagers in Southeast Myanmar,* July 2018; KHRG, *Beautiful Words, Ugly Actions:The Asian Highway in Karen State, Burma,* August 2016.

[22] The Guardian, "Red Cross visits Aung San Suu Kyi after Myanmar military pushed to prove she is alive", 3 August 2026.

[23] Eleven Media Group Co. "Myanmar Establishes National Solidarity and Peace-making Central Committee Led by President", 12 April 2026; Asia Times, "Who should speak for Myanmar? Not Min Aung Hlaing", 14 April 2026.

[24] Development Media Group, "စစ်တပ်နှင့် NCA အပစ်ရပ် ၇ ဖွဲ့တွေ့ ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေးလုပ်ငန်းစဉ် တည်တံ့ခိုင်မြဲအောင် ပူးပေါင်းမည်ဟု ဆို" Facebook post, 9 June 2026.

[25] The National Unity Government (NUG) was formed by the acting cabinet of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) on 16 April 2021, following the 1 February military coup. U Win Myint was retained as President, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as State Counsellor, both still under detention by the State Administration Council (SAC) military. The NUG claims to be the legitimate government of Myanmar and has sought international recognition as such. The NUG cabinet is composed primarily of lawmakers elected in the 2020 election, along with other key ethnic figures. As the military junta has declared the NUG illegal, it is operating as a government-in-exile. On 5 May 2021, the NUG announced the formation of a "People's Defence Force" to serve as its armed wing.

[26] BNI Online, "Analysts Doubt Progress of Myanmar Junta's '100-Day Peace Initiative'", 23 July 2026.

[27] The Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) was established in March 2026 to strengthen political unity and military coordination among resistance actors in Burma. It brings together nine members: the National Unity Government (NUG), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the Karen National Union (KNU), the Chin National Front (CNF), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), the Interim Sagaing Federal Unit, Mandalay Region, and the Interim Magway Federal Unit. Its work includes coordinating foreign affairs, finance, federal affairs, security, and interior affairs.

[28] Mizzima, "SCEF clarifies ASEAN meeting not start of political dialogue with junta", 17 July 2026.

[29] *See, for instance:* Global New Light of Myanmar, "President U Min Aung Hlaing Reports on Government's 100Day Progress at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw", August 2026.

[30] 'Saw' is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

[31] In the body of this report, only the district of each interviewee will be listed. Full location information for each interviewee – including censored village, village tract, township, and district – can be found in Appendix A.

[32] KHRG continues to receive documentation concerning incidents that occurred during the reporting period. The figures presented in this report should therefore be understood as minimum figures and may increase as further documentation is received.

[33] The concentration of aerial attacks in Southeast Burma was also reflected in COAR's monitoring, which recorded 18 air strike incidents and 10 drone/autogyro attack incidents in the region between 10 and 16 April 2026, accounting for half of the 56 incidents

recorded nationwide across these two categories. See: COAR, "Weekly Analytics Hub".

[34] This has been similarly reported elsewhere. *See, for instance:* The Irrawaddy, "Myanmar Junta Airstrikes Kill 100 Civilians During Shift to 'Civilian' Rule", April 2026; and Progressive Voice, "Monthly Situation Update: April 2026", May 2026.

[35] A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

[36] See also: KHRG, "Mu Traw District Incident Report: Burma Army air strikes killed three villagers, injured 12 villagers including a child, and caused destruction to villagers' buildings in Lu Thaw Township (April 2026)", July 2026.

[37] The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the 1 February 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Burma/ Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on 5 May 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

[38] 'U' is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

[39] KHRG, *Tactics of Control: The Burma Army's systematic use of deprivation of liberty and ensuing human rights violations in Southeast Burma*, August 2026.

[40] 'Naw' is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

[41] The Karen National Army (KNA) was established in January 2026, and it is composed mostly of battalions which split from the Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions that serve under the Burma Army. It is active in Mu Traw and Hpa-an districts. The majority of the BGF battalions in two out of four Cantonment Areas, Cantonment Area #2 and Cantonment Area #3, transformed into KNA. However, two battalions under Cantonment Area #3, BGF's Battalion #1013 and #1014, remain under BGF control. They are active in Mu Traw District and remain in ongoing conflict with Brigade #5's KNU/KNLA.

[42] The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was re-formed on 16 January 2016 as a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (2010 – present). During fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA Benevolent throughout 2015, there was internal disagreement within the DKBA Benevolent, which resulted in a number of commanders being dismissed in July 2015. These former commanders then issued a statement in January 2016 declaring the formation of a new splinter group. This organisation has phrased the formation of this group as the revival of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, which was formed in 1994 until it was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the still-active DKBA Benevolent. Importantly, the DKBA Buddhist has not signed the preliminary or nationwide ceasefire with the Myanmar government, whereas the DKBA Benevolent has signed both agreements.

[43] The Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) is a Karen community-based organisation formed in 1949 to support women in its operational areas across locally-defined Karen State and in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. KWO works to empower women, fights against all forms of oppression of women and children and provides support for communities in their operational areas. The organisation promotes women's leadership, gender sensitivity, and runs health and education programs.

[44] In Burma/Myanmar, the scorched earth policy of 'pyat lay pyat', literally 'cut the four cuts', was a counter-insurgency strategy employed by the Tatmadaw as early as the 1950s, and officially adopted in the mid-1960s, aiming to destroy links between insurgents and sources of funding, supplies, intelligence, and recruits from local villages. See Martin Smith. Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999 pp. 258-262.

[45] The relatively high number of arbitrary arrests documented during this period may be associated with arrests related to the elections.

[46] *See, for instance:* KHRG, Tactics of Control : The Burma Army's systematic use of deprivation of liberty and ensuing human rights violations in Southeast Burma, August 2026, p. 2.

[47] Approximately US$6.91–8.20, based on the informal and official exchange rates reported by COAR Global's Weekly Analytics Hub Dashboard on 14 July 2026. https://coar-global.org/weekly-analytics-hub.

[48] Approximately US$11.52–13.67, based on the informal and official exchange rates reported by COAR Global's Weekly Analytics Hub Dashboard on 14 July 2026. https://coar-global.org/weekly-analytics-hub.

[49] National Defence and Security Council Office, "Enabling a Clear Vision for the Multiparty Democracy We All Aspire To", 1 January 2026.

[50] 'Daw' is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

[51] Approximately US$0.16–0.19, based on the informal and official exchange rates reported by COAR Global's Weekly Analytics Hub Dashboard on 28 July 2026. https://coar-global.org/weekly-analytics-hub.

[52] Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008), ss 109(b), 141(b) and 436; International IDEA, "Constitutional profile Myanmar", ConstitutionNet.

[53] *See, for instance*: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database: Transfers of major conventional arms from all countries to Myanmar, deliveries 2024–2025", data generated 24 September 2026; Justice For Myanmar, "India aiding and abetting Myanmar junta atrocities through continued transfers of military equipment", 27 March 2024; Justice For Myanmar, "Belarus regime supplying air defence system to Myanmar military and training personnel as aerial terror campaign intensifies", 28 June 2025.

[54] Myanmar Witness, "Tracing Flights II: A Czech Company Keeps Supplying Aircraft to the Myanmar Air Force", 26 February 2026.

[55] Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, Geneva, 12 August 1949, art. 1.

[56] ICRC, Commentary of 2016 on Convention (I), Article 1: Respect for the Convention, paras. 153-154, 158-160 and 162.

[57] A/56/10, Report of the International Law Commission on the work of its fifty-third session, Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, art. 16 (2001); ICJ Rep 43, 2007, para. 420.

[58] *See, for instance:* KHRG, *Undeniable: War crimes, crimes against humanity and 30 years of villagers' testimonies in rural Southeast Burma*, December 2022.

[59] Arms Trade Treaty, 2014, arts. 6-7.

[60] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, arts. 12(3) and 14; National Unity Government, untitled statement, 20 August 2021.

[61] Names marked with an asterisk (*) were part of the main set of interviews but were not directly quoted in the body of the report. However, their information appears as part of composite data throughout the report.

[62] Village and village tract are omitted from human rights defender information for security purposes.