

What's happening in Shan State: Situation Update

Military tensions remain high between armed groups, specifically the military junta and the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) after the Burmese Military demand the SSPP to withdrawal their three military bases in Mong Hsu township, and there is an expansion of Burmese Military Junta in those areas at Loilem district, Southern Shan State. At the same time, the military junta leader, General Min Aung Hlaing, invited some ethnic armed groups to attend so-called 'peace talk' in May. Both of the Shan State Armies (SSA), RCSS and SSPP, accepted the military junta's invitation.

Two young men driving from Kutkhai to Muse were stopped and forced to transport junta troops to Maw Tawng village, near Muse township on May 4.[1] One of the two young men was an executive member of the Tai Youth Network (TYN), and a member of the Secretariat of the Committee of Shan State Unity (CSSU). The two young men were killed during a clash between the Military junta and an armed group. Later on, May 16, the People Security and Defence Army-Northern Shan State was came out by statement that they're the group that fighting the military junta on that day and to take responsibility for the attached.[2]

The military junta has abducted more than 30 villagers from their homes, including 4 women, in Ywar Ngan, Southern Shan State. Local people have reported to the media that the men were taken to Kalaw, and the women were sent directly to the military junta's camp, to cook for the soldiers at their base near the village.[1] In addition, military junta members dressed in civilian clothes threatened to kill civilians, to obtain information and the specific location of the Ywar Ngan People's Defense Forces (PDF) camp. Furthermore, the military junta arrested around 68 people between May – June, from Lashio and Nawngkhio Townships in Northern Shan State, and Mongton, Pekon, Ywar Ngan and Pindaya Townships from Southern Shan State respectively. The Pa-O National Organization (PNO/PNA), also known as the Pa-O militia force, is forcibly recruiting troops after they announced that both men and women (aged 18 to 50) must serve in the armed group. The announcement stated that all new recruits would undergo military training to strengthen 'security activities' in their Self-Administrative Zone. Additionally, people residing in PNO's controlled areas were ordered to provide money and rice to the PNO/PNA. This controlled area includes Hsi Hseng, Hopong, and some tract of Taunggyi, in Taunggyi District and Mongpaw Township in Loilem/District in Southern Shan State.

The people of Muse, Nam Kham, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, and Kutkai from Northern and Kase, Mong Nawng, Mauk Mai, and Kaein Tawng from Southern Shan State have reported that TNLA, SSPP, KIO/KIA, MNDA, RCSS and the people's militias are demanding taxes from the villagers. This is an additional burden to the people in the area who are already facing extreme hardship and struggling to earn daily wages. As such, communities live with uncertainty: if they do not pay taxes, then they will be arrested held hostage, or have their property destroyed.

[1] <https://english.shannews.org/archives/24919>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/psdamuse/photos/a.115561290697811/334054645515140/>

[3] <https://english.shannews.org/archives/24917>

The situation of IDPs and humanitarian crisis

The military junta used airstrikes during armed clashes with the local People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) near the Shan-Karenni border. Then, military junta soldiers burned down more than 40 civilians' houses in Saung Num Gae Village in Phaikhun Township, Southern Shan State. As a result, many local residents fled from their homes to Panglaung, Hsi Hseng, and other nearby townships.[4]

Due to the armed conflict between the military junta and PDFs in Phaikhun and Nyaung Shwe Townships, over a hundred villagers tried to relocate for safety. However, the Pa-O National Army (PNA) and military junta soldiers stopped them from leaving the area, forcing them to turn back. Some of the IDP were asked for money at the security gate near Loi Tong Village, Nyaung Shwe township, Southern Shan State.[5]

Around 8,000 IDPs from Phaikhun and Mong Pai/ Moebye are sheltering in Hsi Hseng Township, and they are facing humanitarian crisis as a severe shortage of food and supplies.[6] As the military junta continues arresting local donors, humanitarian aids workers, humanitarian aid does not reach host communities, or IDPs. Similarly, around 250 IDPs in Pindaya, including 75 women and children, are experiencing a serious shortage of food, medicine, clothing, and sanitary pads for women.

Another local partner organization in SWAN's network reported that around 700 IDPs were forced to flee their homes during the military junta's offensive operation in their home-based areas, around Phaikhun. As a result, they had to flee into the jungle to seek safety near Phaikhun Township in Southern Shan State. There is no road in that area, so they had to walk to the location where they sought (temporary) safe shelter. However, during the rainy season, the temporary shelters constructed with thin plastic tarpaulins, could not protect them from the rain. Also, there were not sufficient number of plastic tarpaulins to distribute to IDPs. Currently, women and children are in critical condition in the jungle during the monsoon. They are in need of emergency support, including food, shelter, and medicine.

[4] <https://english.shannews.org/archives/24951>

[5] <https://english.shannews.org/archives/24938>

[6] <https://mizzima.com/article/8000-idps-shan-states-hsi-hseng-township-need-aid>

Prevalence of Sexual and Gender Based Violence, and Impacts on Women

33 cases of gender-based violence, or violence against women, were reported to SWAN in May and June. Most of the incidents are cases of sexual violence and sexual coercion. There are 10 cases of sexual violence and sexual coercion, and three of those were committed by local influential armed group members. And there are 8 cases of rape and 15 domestic violence cases. Most of the survivors are women, and their ages range from 10 to 50 years. The incidents were collected in 5 townships from the northern, 4 townships from the southern and 1 from Mong Hsat, Eastern Shan State.

Child rape and child sexual coercion incidents were reported. In one of the cases, a 10-year-old girl was raped by a 42-year-old neighbor when the child's mother went outside. When the mother came back, the child was crying and bleeding. The girl was sent to the hospital, and the perpetrator was arrested.

Another reported incident was a rape and domestic violence. It involved a woman who was raped by her brother-in-law while she was ill and receiving treatment in bed. After the incident, she reported it to the local ethnic armed group. She also informed her sister of the incident, but her sister did not believe her. Then, her sister physically assaulted her for reporting the incident to the armed group.

The reported number of domestic violence cases has increased, as illicit activities such as drug use and gambling continue to increase as well. One incident of domestic violence involved a husband who was addicted to drugs; when his wife did not pay for the drugs, he beat her. He also found fault with her, and then accused her of having an affair. The woman complained to the village head, and then asked for a divorce. She could not bear the situation any longer, after tolerating his behavior for many years.

The former legal system in Myanmar did not fully protect women, and it was nearly impossible for women to access the judicial system, especially in ethnic areas. Since the coup, the rule of law is non-existent, and perpetrators act with total impunity. As a result, the number of sexual and gender-based violence cases has dramatically increased throughout Shan State.

Sources

Shan Women's Action Network
Shan Herald Agency for News
Mizzima
Shwe Phee Myay News Agency
Shan Human Right Foundation

SWAN's Action Calls:

- We Shan Women's Action Network strongly urges the armed groups involved to stop the fighting and find a way to get a negotiated solution to build a Federal Democratic Union to achieve the original goals of equality, self-determination, and peaceful coexistence.
- We strongly urge all armed groups in Shan State to take effective action against perpetrators of sexual violence against women, including rape, occurring within their respective territories and organizations.
- We urge all armed groups to prevent sexual violence from occurring in their respective territories.
- Then International Community and INGO should support local organizations who are providing emergency support services: including case support, support to health service providers, and women's rights defenders.
- All stakeholders, including armed groups, humanitarian organizations, and international organizations, should urgently provide protection and humanitarian assistance to IDPs and host communities.

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