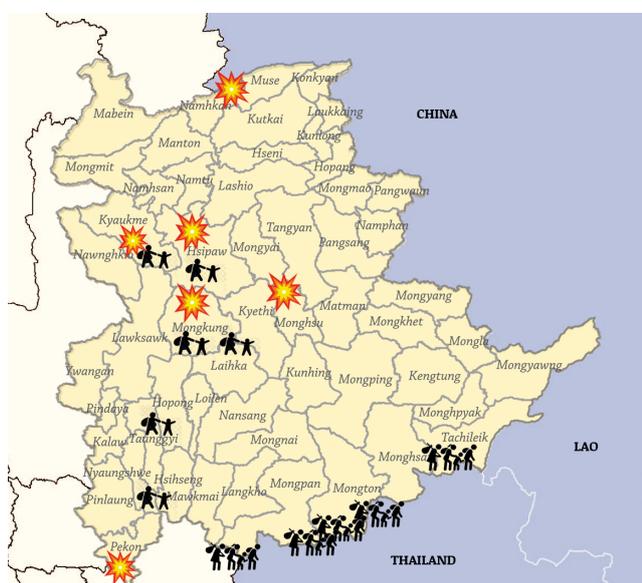


2021 December to 2022 January

Impacts of Armed Conflicts in Shan State

Fighting between State Administration Council (SAC) forces and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) in northern and southern Shan State; fighting between SAC forces and the People's Defense Forces (PDF) and fighting between the EAOs against each other continues to erupt in Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Lashio, Hsenwi, Tangyan, Kutkai, Namhkam, and Muse townships in northern Shan State and Kehsi, Mong Kung, Laihka and Phekon townships in southern Shan State.



As fighting intensifies, armed groups raise taxation and forcibly recruit young men from their strongholds. Armed men entered the village at night with the households' name list to drag the men out of their houses for military service. Some young men and villagers fled in fear, leaving only older women and children at home. As young men fled their homes, their parents were abducted and given two options: call their sons back to join the service within seven days or provide a replacement for their son.

Most of them have fled to the Thai border. Farmland and cattle were sold and paid for the journey to the Thai border and taking refuge in Thailand. These are the stories of detainees who attempted to cross the border and enter Thailand illegally.

On January 29, 2022, 227 displaced people from Mong Kung, Mong Hsu, Keng Tawng, Laihka, Panglong, Taunggyi, Phekon townships of Shan State, and Loikaw township of Kayah State entered Fang District of Chiang Mai Province. And they were arrested. Among them, 103 were women.

According to a man displaced by the armed conflict and arrested at the border post, people say in the village that if they find no one at the houses, they will burn down the houses. So, they had to leave their grandparents behind them. Most people who tried to cross the Thai border and entered Fang District in Chiang Mai province became displaced persons because of the armed conflicts, the forced recruitment by EAOs, and some were government servants who joined the Civil Disobedient Movement (CDM). Most of them are Shans, including Karenni, Pa-Os, Ta'angs, and Inthas.

According to some young women who fled from Mong Kung, the number of Wa soldiers has increased in their township and forced marriages between soldiers and local young women and other sexual violence. Reports of these cases came from the area. Homes are no longer safe, and parents feel that it would be safer for their daughters to go to Thailand to work. The brokerage fee is 25,000-27,000 Bahts (1.3 to 1.5 million Kyats) per person for bringing them to Thailand.

The authority held arrested displaced persons from Shan State in the Fang district of Chiang Mai province cells and put more than 20 people in each cell. Therefore some got sick and tested for COVID-19. Those who had positive results of COVID-19 had to go to the community health center for treatment. Children under 18 were separated from their parents and sent to children's detention centers.

The situation of Displaced Women

In December 2021 and January 2022, nearly 7,000 people have displaced due to fighting between EAOs in Shan State and between the SAC forces and the PDFs. More than half of them were women and children, under the age of 18 were nearly 200. They had to take refuge in the towns of Kyaukme, Hsipaw in the northern Shan State, and Taunggyi, Yawnghwe, Mong Kung, and Laihka in the southern Shan State.

The fighting between the SAC forces and PDFs in Paikhun Township displaced 765 people. Of these, 457 were women, and 308 were men.

Among the displaced persons, pregnant women, new mothers, and infants were most likely to suffer from malnutrition and faced with difficulties such as accommodation and basic facilities. Aid workers in the region also reported a shortage of warm clothes for displaced people who had to face the cold weather in Shan State. It was a concern for the mental and physical health of new mothers and women who had just given birth during their escape.

In January, there was no nurse to offer delivery assistance for pregnant women in an IDP camp in Laihka. In addition, more than 20 newborns of less than six months who needed nutritional supplements were in the camp as well.

A pregnant woman from Hamngai village tract, in Mong Kung Township, Southern Shan State, was about to give birth but had to walk in the forest for nearly six days carrying her bags. She was frightened when she heard gunshots and shells, but she had to flee. She gave birth to her child along the way at a house in a village. The delivery was difficult but successful. Afterward, she had to continue her journey to reach an IDP camp. She built a hut to stay in the camp, and when the rain purring, she had to move to a place where she won't get wet. She talked about her life as a displaced pregnant woman in a conflict zone. And difficulties she faced during and after childbirth.

Violence against women and failure of the justice system

Violence against women has increased since the military coup. The coup resulted in ignoring the rule of law, violence in the communities increased, and hard to get access to justice.

In January, we documented that violence increased in the areas where we can outreach between southern and northern Shan State. Cases included four young girls under the age of 18. Perpetrators of sexual violence on women and girls were people from the same village, relatives, boyfriends, and men of armed groups.

On January 23, 2022, an armed man broke into the home of a teenage girl from Northern Shan State and raped her while other family members were not at home. Although we heard these kinds of cases, people are silent. EAOs troops are nearby, and people are afraid to speak out to media or outsiders because they are concerned for their safety.

A militiaman from the People Militia Force (PMF) of Mong Ha, in Mong Yai Township, northern Shan State, shot a woman who refused to accept him as a boyfriend. Regarding this case, no action against the violator, no one took responsibility, no accountability or transparency.

In times of political turmoil and armed conflicts, women face domestic and sexual violence. In January, a 16-year-old girl encountered a 22-year-old man who tried to rape her. Her parents found out while he was attempting to rape. According to customary practice, her parents and the village elders forced her to marry the man who tried to rape her.

On December 25, a 21-year-old woman in Yawnghwe Township, southern Shan State, dated her boyfriend. He asked her to have sex with him. Although she disagreed, he tried to rape her. While he attempted to rape her, two of his friends came by. All three of them forced her and raped her. The survivor was so frightened and shaken. It was difficult breathing for her, but she could call home before she lost consciousness. Her family found her at 11 p.m finally. The survivor still has to go for medical check-ups and get the treatment.

Recommendations

There have been decades of fighting between military regime forces and EAOs in Shan State, and today, fighting between EAOs against each other has intensified. The result of the conflicts is the people of Shan State having to face various hardships. Therefore, the Shan Women's Action Network strongly urges the 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 and self-determination and peaceful coexistence.

For more than half a century, armed forces of successive military regimes have committed various human rights violations in non-Burman ethnic areas and continue to commit appalling atrocities against people across the country. Organizations claiming to be fighting for justice should not be acting as the armed forces of the successive military regime. And should not allow impunity for sexual violence against women, including rape, in their territories or organizations.

We urge all armed groups in Shan State to take effective action against those perpetrators of sexual violence against women, including rape occurred within their territories or organizations. And take precautionary measures to prevent them from occurring.

We strongly urge the stakeholders such as the armed groups, humanitarian organizations, and international organizations to provide security and humanitarian assistance for the displaced people.

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