

PEACE & CONFLICT UPDATE – AUGUST 2017

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ACRONYM DICTIONARY

AA	Arakan Army
AAPP	Assistance Association for Political Prisoners
ALA	Arakan Liberation Army
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
BA	Burma Army (Tatmadaw)
BHRN	Burma Human Rights Network
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DASSK	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
DPN	Delegation for Political Dialogue (negotiating body of the UNFC)
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
FPNCC	Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JICM	Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting
KBC	Karen Baptist Convention
KIA	Kachin Independence Army, armed wing of the KIO
KIO	Kachin Independence organization
KNU	Karen National Union
KNPP	Karen National Progressive Party
MNHRC	Myanmar National Human Rights Commission
MRTV	Myanmar Radio and Television
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (in name only, not inclusive and not nationwide)
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NSCN-K	Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PC	Peace Commission
PPST	Peace Process Steering Committee (NCA negotiating body)
PSLF/TNLA	Palaung State Liberation Front/ Ta'ang National Liberation Army
RCSS/SSA-S	Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (South)
SHRF	Shan Human Rights Foundation
SSPP/SSA-N	Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (North)
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UN	United Nations
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UPC	Union Peace Conference
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
21CPC	21st Century Panglong Conference

AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS

- BA continued to clash with a number of EAOs in northern Burma, including the KIA and TNLA as well as the ceasefire group SSPP/SSA-S and NCA signatory RCSS/SSA-S.

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- BA surprise attack in Kachin State's Kasung village forced villagers out of their homes, killing one and injuring numerous others. Hundreds of villagers also fled conflict between BA and TNLA in northern Shan State. One woman was killed after being hit by an artillery shell during a BA and TNLA clash.
- Several reports of human rights abuse by the BA in Kachin and Shan States.
- SSPP/SSA submitted a resignation letter to the ethnic alliance UNFC.
- Karen IDPs in Ei Thu Hta camp are caught in a hard place as BA troops have not withdrawn and international support will stop after September.
- Burma Army dropped charges against six journalists.
- Humanitarian crisis in Arakan State started after the ARSA attacked 31 police posts, followed by brutal 'clearance operations' by Burmese security forces, killing scores and displacing hundreds of thousands.

DISPLACEMENT UPDATE

Northern Burma—Shan and Kachin States

- 88 Generation Peace and Open Society was prevented from delivering sacks of rice to an IDP camp facing food shortages in Kachin State's Sadone Township.
- Two senior members of Warazup's KBC were reportedly abducted and interrogated by BA troops. Soldiers also stole 700,000 kyats [515 USD] along with other personal items from two church treasurers.
- DASSK and the KBC came into an agreement in which DASSK pledged to assist IDP children living in camps to receive an education. Approximately 100 children from 70 IDP camps in Kachin and northern Shan State would receive permission to travel to state schools.
- Mothers who talked to The Irrawaddy for their August 10 report on unplanned families in Kachin IDP camps said they were "terrified of becoming pregnant again". According to the UNFPA, 17.9 percent of women in Kachin State (16% nationwide) have an unmet need for contraceptives. Barriers include cost, supply, logistics and cultural norms.
- Around 1,000 IDPs in Namti, Mogaung Township's returned home to Kasung and Zup Mai Yang villages in Kachin State on August 22 after fleeing clashes between the BA and KIA on August 11. The return of the IDPs was initiated after negotiations led by preachers and members of local Peace-talk Creation Group (PCG).
- Kachinland News reported on August 30 that following recent skirmishes between the BA and KIA, local villagers have been increasingly targeted and abused by BA soldiers. Sources

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reported two incidents in which two women and two men were forced to serve as guides in Htoi San Yang village and Jan Mai Pa respectively.

Refugees and IDPs along the Thailand-Burma border

- KNU representatives and Karen CSOs urged BA troops to withdraw from Papun Township on 31 July so that IDPs from Ei Tu Hta camp could return to their homes safely. Camp residents have been torn between dwindling food rations (set to stop the end of September 2017) and BA occupation in the region, according to the IDP Supporting Committee.
- At a July 30 coordination meeting organised by KNU's Papun District Executive Committee, participants demanded that the government, KNU Central Committee leaders and international donors handle the refugee and IDP situation based on assessments of current political developments, and asked that no one be resettled without prior guarantees of current political developments.
- Despite appeals by the local branch of the KNU for international groups to continue provision of international aid to the Ei Tu Hta IDP camp, international aid will stop at the end of September 2017 as had been projected 18 months ago.
- The houses destroyed in a July 5 fire outbreak at Karenni No 1 Refugee Camp were rebuilt by August 11, allowing 321 previously-homeless refugees to move back into their own homes.
- Myine Gyi Ngu camp, which currently shelters some 5,500 Karen IDPs (displaced by conflict in September 2016), is suffering food shortages, a situation which is getting more severe by the day. Most of the IDPs have cited the remaining presence of landmines as the reason for not wanting to return home.

Thailand—Labor law and migrant crisis

- Thailand's Ministry of Labour opened 99 centres nationwide for migrant workers from Burma to upgrade their legal status.
- As of August 22, Thailand has processed more than 770,000 illegal migrant workers who decided to register with the state in their bid to stay in Thailand, said Employment Department Director-General Waranon Pitiwan.

Western Burma

- Major displacement crisis in the Arakan State more than 350,000 displaced according to UN and Rohingya sources (September 7 figure).

PEACE PROCESS

- Stakeholders in Burma's peace process shared their views and recommendations during an informal consultation in Rangoon on July 29 with the government's negotiating body PC. Among the participants were peace experts, civil society members, representatives from

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ethnic political parties, media practitioners, and descendants of those who signed the 1947 Panglong Agreement.

- At a meeting in Thailand August 1-3, the KNU promoted the NCA at a meeting with the KNPP. This was the first time the central committee leaders of the KNU and the KNPP met to exchange views on the peace process.
- The PC held informal talks with the DPN (UNFC's negotiating body) in Chiang Mai on August 4 in an effort to persuade the ethnic bloc to attend the next UPC. The parties also agreed on a new meeting in Rangoon August 10-11 to discuss the UNFC's 9-point proposal. According to a statement released after the Rangoon meeting, the delegations agreed to take the negotiation results back to their respective leadership bodies. Next meeting was tentatively scheduled for early September.
- DASSK held a public roundtable meeting in a Mandalay region village on August 8 to discuss the peace process in an effort to re-emphasise that the 21CPC must be a priority for the country. The eight village representatives who met with DASSK also took the opportunity to voice their concerns on human rights abuses such as land grabbing occurring in the area, and also on the lack of electricity in and around the village.
- DASSK said on August 7 that lack of peace in the country undermined its economic development and also that international investors did not want to invest in the country because there was no peace and stability.
- The PPST, comprised of the NCA signatory EAOs, said the JICM needed to be called to review misunderstandings that emerged after the second 21CPC in May.
- NSCN-K peace negotiator Kyaw Wan Sein expressed on August 14 that the NSCN-K would not sign the NCA without reaching an agreement that covers Nagas in both Burma and India. The NSCN-K participated as an observer to the NCA-drafting process, but is not interested in signing it, instead proposing that a "tripartite dialogue" involving Burma, India and the Naga be used to reach a solution.
- The head of the PC advisory team said on August 16 that a future meeting with the FPNCC would be held within the next three months, prior to the next CPC.
- The SSSPP/SSA-N submitted a resignation letter on August 12 to the UNFC. This is the 5th UNFC resignation this year and leaves the UNFC bloc with only four of its original eleven members. This is especially attributed to the formation of the northern EAO bloc FPNCC led by the UWSA.
- A two-day Women, Peace and Security Forum was organised by the Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies and attended by 180 representatives from different states with discussions on female participate in the peace process, preventing sexual violence in conflict areas and combating discrimination against women.
- The NMSP, which heads the UNFC after KIA's resignation, indicated on August 24 that it would be signing the NCA shortly—setting a three-month clock on the decision process.

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- The FPNCC held a six-day meeting from August 18 to 24 in Panghsang, the UWSA headquarters in Wa Special Region, northern Shan State, to discuss principles of negotiation with the government, the 21CPC, the country's political situation and collaboration among EAOs. In particular, the FPNCC appealed for more Chinese cooperation for the achievement of successful peace process.
- The FPNCC released a press statement on August 24 conveying its intentions to join the next 21CPC / UPC if invited.

ARMED CONFLICT AND ABUSE

Northern Burma—Shan and Kachin States

- The TNLA reported that Chinese soldiers were deployed along the border areas near Mongko, Kyukote (Pang Hseng) and Namhkam townships in Shan State on July 25.
- A woman was struck by an artillery shell and died after fighting between the BA and the TNLA flared over the weekend of August 5 in Kutkai Township, Shan State. The TNLA confirmed two clashes broke out on August 5, in neighbouring Manton Township, around the same time.
- BA closed all entry and exit points in Manton township on August 8, reportedly following an ambush by the TNLA, causing difficulties for civilians who could not leave to get basic supplies or to obtain medical treatment. Around 20 vehicles were trapped for five days after the closure of entry and exit points. On August 14, it was reported that the BA inspected every house in the township. Visitors to the town were forced to stay at a monastery, and if they left, they were arrested and detained under suspicion.
- SHRF reported a clash between the BA and the RCSS/SSA near Hai Khai village, Nam Pha Khee tract, with BA deploying hundreds of troops. SHRF alleged that the high-level deployment was in order to persecute civilians, and that large-scale arrests and torture were carried out.
- As of August 10, 300 villagers had to leave their homes when hostilities between BA and TNLA intensified near Aukmanwei village, Namhsan township, and about 100 residents fled Khay Khin and Man Wel villages after artillery shells fell there.
- Kachinland News reported fighting in western Kachin State, with a clash occurring between the KIA and BA near Ka-maing Township on July 30. On July 31, KIA ambushed BA troops in Bahkyi Khan and Nawng Lung Hka. There were also clashes between the BA and KIA near the Jelan village tract on August 2, 5 and 9.
- A surprise attack was carried out by BA on civilians at Kasung village, Kachin State, on August 11, forcing villagers to flee their homes. Fleeing residents took shelter in Lambraw Yang. One villager was killed and numerous others injured by beatings from Burma Army soldiers, FBR reported.
- A two-year-old child and her mother were among four people injured by artillery shells during an August 13 skirmish in Namkham township between the BA and TNLA.

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- Members of the humanitarian Hpakant-based Myusha Zinlum Hpung group, were reportedly stopped and harassed for several hours along Kamaing-Dumbang highway by Burma police on August 17.
- Renewed fighting broke out in Southern Shan State's Mine Shu/Mong Shu township on August 22 between BA and SSPP/SSA, reportedly leading to casualties on both sides, although the exact number is unknown.

Western Burma—Arakan State

- Police discovered three mutilated bodies near Chook Pyin village, Rathedaung Township on July 31.
- Two men from Kaing Gyi village, Maungdaw Township, were shot dead on August 3, and four women were reported missing. The bodies of the two men were found in southern Maungdaw Township's Mayu mountain region, where the Burma government has said Rohingya militants are operating. Burma Army have also been carried out clearance operations in the area.
- The bodies of six farmers—some shot dead and others with machete wounds—were also found in southern Maungdaw Township on August 3.
- On August 4, violent confrontations occurred when hundreds of villagers from Outt Nan village, Rathedaung Township, resisted the police, who attempted to arrest men suspected of being militants.
- A fully-equipped BA battalion was dispatched to Maungdaw on the morning of August 10. The increased presence of security forces and more 'clearance operations' in Arakan State, in preparation for an operation to route out Rohingya armed insurgents, were confirmed by a Union minister on August 14. BA imposed restrictions on freedom of movement and extended the curfew.
- Sittway Township Chairman said on August 15 that the government was planning to provide military training to local ethnic Arakan people and equip them with arms to resolve armed conflicts in Maungdaw Township. This claim was subsequently rejected by the government's spokesperson Zaw Htay.
- The AA and the ALA clashed near the India-Burma border over a territorial dispute on August 22.
- ARSA carried out overnight attacks on 31 police and military outposts, leaving 71 people dead on August 25. ARSA claimed responsibility for the attacks via Twitter, calling them "defensive action" against government forces. The move followed a two-week blockade by the authorities on food for Muslims in Rathedaung Township, and increased violence in Rathedaung and Maungdaw against Rohingya communities.
- By August 27, it was reported that the death toll from the August 25 attacks had risen to 89 as more bodies of Rohingya insurgents were found around the scene of fighting. BA sources have said at least 1,000 insurgents were involved in the attack, but residents in Maungdaw,

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Buthidaung and Rathedaung said many armed villagers joined the Rohingya rebels in the attacks with weapons such as machetes.

- On August 30, IOM said about 18,445 Rohingya had registered in Bangladesh. Many showed visible physical injuries and also signs of trauma. The reported death toll rose to 109 people. It was furthermore reported that Bangladesh's border guards were trying to block Rohingya from entering the country, and had sent about 550 Rohingya back across the Naf river to Burma. Some 4,000 refugees are stranded in the "no man's land" between the two countries, where temporary shelters stretched for several hundred metres.
- Major displacement crisis in the Arakan State more than 350,000 displaced according to UN and Rohingya sources (September 7 figure).

(By September 7, the UN estimated that over 250,000 civilians had fled to Bangladesh, over 160,000 of them during the past two weeks. At least 400 have died. Local Rohingya sources place the numbers significantly higher, estimating that over 350,000 had fled.)

Eastern Burma—Mon State

- BA troops entered villages in an NMSP-controlled area on August 9 and 10, while the NMSP was meeting with the government in Rangoon as part of the UNFC's DNP and PC negotiations. One of the villages, Khwa village, where the BA arrived, is a permanent base for the NMSP and a MNLA base for operations. BA troops declared they were touring the area, although it was reported that the move was a form of pressure towards the NMSP.
- On August 16, BA and NMSP met amidst 200 BA soldiers were reportedly active near the NMSP's Moulmein District area. The NMSP delegation requested that the BA withdraw its battalions. It was reported August 23 that BA troops were still present in NMSP territory.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Environmental and land issues (focus on ethnic border areas)

- Activists and CSOs banded together to create the Karen State Coal Working Group in order to warn residents of the dangers of coals through environmental awareness trainings held from July 20 to August 5, following a greenlight given by the Karen State government to the Toyo-Thai Corporation to build a 1280-megawatt coal-fired power plant sitting between Wut Gyi, Htone Taung, and Thone Ein villages in Hpa-an township.
- It was reported August 18 that a controversial 500-ton, US\$400 million cement factory run by Mawlamyine Cement Limited in the Mon State, had not sought permission from the Ministry of Electricity and Energy in order to generate power using a 49-megawatt coal-fired power plant. A public consultation on the Environment Impact Assessment and Social Impact Assessment reports on the factory was held on August 17.
- During an initial public meeting on August 19 with Karen State residents and the Explosives Consultation and Application company over the company's proposed gravel factory in Mee Zan village which will necessitate quarrying on Mee Zan mountain, local residents

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overwhelmingly objected to the plan, citing previous projects that had gone awry with consequences for villagers.

Unlawful Association Act—The case of Lawi Weng, Aye Nai, and Pyae Phone Aung

- Six men charged for “unlawful association”, including reporters Lawi Weng, Aye Nai and Pyae Phone Aung, were denied bail on the grounds that they were not residents of Hsipaw Township on August 7 and again on August 18.
- The prosecution’s military witnesses were no-shows at a hearing for the trial, reportedly because they were on military frontline duty, it was reported August 14.
- A MNHRC member who met with three detained journalists said they had not broken the law, according to The Irrawaddy. The MNHRC submitted its findings and suggestions on August 30 on the case to the defense ministry.
- On September 1, Burma Army said it will be dropping charges against six journalists; DVB reporters Aye Nai and Pyae Phone Aung, and The Irrawaddy’s Lawi Weng, The Voice Daily’s chief editor Kyaw Min Swe (see below) and columnist Ko Ko Maung, and Wai Phyo, editor-in-chief of Eleven Media.

Section 66(d) 2013 Telecommunications Law

- Myanmar Now Chief Editor Swe Win was released on bail by Maha Aung Myay Township court in Mandalay on the afternoon of August 1, following a re-arrest on July 31 as he was trying to board a flight from Rangoon to Bangkok. The bail was set at 5 million kyat (US\$3,675). Swe Win appeared before the same court for the third time on August 21.
- The parliament’s Upper House approved amendments to Section 66(d) on August 2 in a confidential vote. Under the approved amendments, judges can release on bail those charged under the law. Also, only people directly affected by an alleged offence, or those with the permission of an affected person, can press charges under the law. The maximum prison sentence was also cut to two years from three. However, the law’s most contentious clause, which broadly prohibits the use of telecommunications networks to “extort, defame, disturb, or intimidate” remained in place. The amendments were finally authorized by President Htin Kyaw on August 29.

Calling out for media freedom

- In a talk with villagers in central Burma on August 7, transmitted on state broadcaster MRTV, DASSK exhorted the public to follow official statements on the government’s activities, specifically referring to official reports about the government’s response to the crisis in western Arakan State.

International community involvement

- HRW issued a Q&A on August 3 urging the UN to insist on its mandated fact-finding mission investigating alleged human rights abuses in Burma, established by OHCHR in March 2017.

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Burma government officials continues to block these efforts by denying visas to mission members.

Human rights abuses against Rohingya Muslims

- On August 7, the government rejected allegations of crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing during a crackdown against Rohingya Muslims last year, accusing the UN of making exaggerated claims in its report on the issue.
- BHRN and 19 other organisations issued a letter to DASSK on August 7 calling on the Burma government to ensure the rights of Muslims residing in Burma.
- A coalition of 20 political parties led by the military-backed USDP called on the government to declare to the international community that there is “no Rohingya ethnicity” in Burma, following discussions on August 14. After the talks, they signed the statement, among which demands included rejected the term “Rohingya”.

Also in the news

- The Senior Women of Shan State submitted an open letter to the government on July 31. They listed issues and recommendations outlining the hardships facing people in the state: peace and conflict, drugs, environment, land, youth, cultural heritage, and food/medicine.
- Members of the MNHRC arrived in northern Shan State to carry out an inspection of jail cells in police stations and courts in Lashio and Hsipaw in northern Shan State as part of countrywide prison reforms in Burma, claiming to ensure human rights law is not violated in Burma’s prisons and that the UN’s standard minimum rules are met concerning the treatment of prisoners.
- The AAPP said on August 16 that there were at least 89 political prisoners in Burma at the end of July. 39 are currently serving prison sentences, 50 in prison awaiting trial, and another 136 awaiting trial outside of prison, charged under archaic laws like the Telecommunications Law or the Peaceful Assembly Law. The organization said there were 225 people oppressed over their political activities in Burma in July.
- 73 public high schools in Bago Region will benefit from a new human rights programme, after an agreement with the government and the education ministry. The training involves the AAPP and introduces key human rights issues and law texts such as the UDHR and the CRC.