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## ACRONYMS

AA	Arakan Army
APHR	Parliamentarians for Human Rights
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BA	Burma Army (Tatmadaw)
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSSU	Committee for Shan State Unity
DASSK	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPN	Delegation for Political Dialogue (negotiating body of the UNFC)
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
FPNCC	Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee
HURFOM	Human Rights Foundation of Monland
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KNU	Karen National Union
KIA	Kachin Independence Army, armed wing of the KIO
KIO	Kachin Independence organization
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (in name only, not inclusive and not nationwide)
NLD	National League for Democracy
PNLA	Pa-O National Liberation Army
PSLF/TNLA	Palaung State Liberation Front/ Ta'ang National Liberation Army
RCSS/SSA-S	Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (South)
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
SHRF	Shan Human Rights Foundation
ToR	Terms of Reference
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UN	United Nations
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
UPC	Union Peace Conference
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
UWSA	United Wa State Army
WFP	World Food Programme
21CPC	21st Century Panglong Conference

For more acronyms, go to <http://www.burmalink.org/background/acronym-dictionary/>

## JULY IN BRIEF

- BA continues to abuse the rights of civilians, violations including arbitrary arrests, torture, and killings.
- Hundreds were newly displaced in the Shan State, following clashes between BA, RCSS/SSA-S and TNLA. Clashes also intensified between the BA and KIA in western Kachin State.
- Around 1,000 new IDPs are sheltering in churches after last month's conflict around Tanai Township, Kachin State.
- Severe fire in Karenni Refugee Camp (1) left over 150 Karenni refugees homeless.
- A Committee for Shan State Unity meeting in Thailand was cancelled by BA, presumably to prevent Shan unity.

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- BA Information Team declared the use of military ranks by non-state armed organizations illegal.
- Community members and local environmental and human rights groups continue to raise concerns about the impacts of development projects.
- The three journalists arrested in June remain remanded in Shan State. Local and international groups have called for their unconditional release as well as greater media freedom.
- UN special rapporteur Yanghee Lee made a 12-day trip to Burma amidst an "escalating security situation."

## DISPLACEMENT UPDATE

### *Northern Burma - Shan and Kachin States*

- More than 500 IDPs remain in five camps in Namtu for fear of being caught in the clashes between the BA and the TNLA. The IDPs do not have access to proper education, appropriate nutrition and are suffering from emotional distress.
- Hundreds of civilians were newly displaced in the Shan State by fighting between the RCSS/SSA-S and the BA and TNLA.
- Villages around Tanai Township have been left deserted after residents were ordered to leave by June 15. Kachin church leaders called for long-term solutions for the around 1,000 IDPs who are sheltering in churches. Church leaders have received food aid from social welfare organizations, political parties and the WFP.
- DASSK and the KBC discussed on July 24 IDP children's education and the resettlement of IDPs to places where clashes are unlikely. There are over 100,000 IDPs since the renewed conflict in 2011 between the KIA and BA. Observers have stated the meeting suggests DASSK is trying to bridge the divide between ethnic people, EAOs and the government. KBC members amount to over 400,000 and the group has a strong influence in the majority Christian Kachin State.
- The UWSA began confiscating farmland and homes from ethnic Lahu villagers in eastern Shan State in early July displacing dozens of families.

### *Karen refugees and IDPs*

- The KDHW and the Burma health department carried out a joint vaccination campaign at the Myaing Gyi Ngu IDP camp in Karen State in July 4-6. Over 200 children were vaccinated against tuberculosis, tetanus, chickenpox, diphtheria, pertussis, hepatitis B, pneumococcal, measles and polio. Around 4,000 IDPs remain displaced after fighting broke out in late 2016.
- A severe fire broke out in Ward 5 of the Karenni Refugee Camp 1 (Ban Mai Nai Soi) on the Thailand-Burma border on July 5. About 30 houses were burnt down and 30 dismantled to prevent the fire from spreading. More than 150 Karenni refugees were left without shelter

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or household supplies. The Karenni Refugee Committee issued a call for aid for the victims of the fire on July 17.

- 23 Karen refugees from Mae La refugee camp arrived in Seoul on July 25, as part of a 3-year resettlement program which started in 2015. A total of 86 will have been resettled at the end of the program this August. The refugees are allowed to live and work, will be given job and language training, and will be able to apply for Korean citizenship after three years.

## ***Thailand – Labor law and migrant crisis***

- The crackdown that began on June 22 in Thailand led to tens of thousands of workers fleeing the country, most returning to Burma. Subsequently, the Thai Government announced a 120-day delay in enforcing the new labor regulation, later extended to 180 days (until January 1 2018).
- During a press conference at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population on July 5, U Thein Swe announced that the public and private actors were collaborating to create jobs for those returning to Burma.
- On July 7, Thai Labour Minister Gen Sirichai Distakul met Burmese Labour Minister Thien Swe in Naypyidaw to discuss the new labour regulations and set up a joint working committee to see through the next six months. The two country representatives discussed the registration of Burma nationals and the improvement of identity verification measures among other issues.
- The Burmese Migrant Teachers Association said on July 10 that migrant learning centers in Mae Sot were also re-opening after brief shutdowns following the arrests of teachers in late June.
- The Thailand Ministry opened 99 immigration centers around the country to help undocumented workers legalize their status. The Ministry has reported that over 146,000 workers from Burma were able to obtain proper legal documentation to work in Thailand. According to IOM estimates, there are over 3 million migrants from Burma in Thailand, 2 million of them illegal.

## ***Thailand - Landmark human trafficking case***

- A Thai judge handed down 62 guilty verdicts in Thailand's biggest human trafficking trial on July 19. Among the 103 defendants was Lieutenant-General Manas Kongpan, who received 27 years for multiple human trafficking charges and other offences. Other offenders were also found guilty of taking part in organised transnational crime, forcible detention leading to death, and of rape.
- The trial began in 2015 after a Thai crackdown on trafficking gangs following the discovery 30 bodies near the Thai-Malaysia border which authorities said was part of a jungle camp where traffickers held migrants from Bangladesh and Burma as hostages.

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- Rights groups welcomed the outcome of the trial but called for further investigations into smugglers' camps where many more victims of beatings, disease and starvation are believed to be buried.

## PEACE PROCESS

For an overview of the peace process and the main actors, go to <https://www.burmalink.org/peace-process-overview/>.

- The PPST – the negotiating body of the NCA signatory EAOs - met on June 28-July 1 in Chiang Mai to review the peace process. The absence of national ethnic dialogues in the Shan and Arakan states was addressed. It was said that the implementation of the NCA needs to be reviewed, having deviated from the original agreement. EAOs had an agreement with the previous U Thein Sein government as part of NCA which committed the government to the SSR, but the BA and the current government are now insisting on a DDR framework instead. A July 2 PPST Statement announced the implementation review and reform team, which will be led by KNU vice-chairman Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win and undertake the review of the UPC.
- Representatives of DPN - the negotiating body of the UNFC - and PPST met for two days in mid-July in Chiang Mai to discuss potential areas for cooperation within the peace process. Topics raised were notably joint ceasefire monitoring, ToR, the UNFC eight-point proposal and future strategies.
- An informal meeting between the DPN and the government's PC on July 20 saw the announcement of an official meeting due in August, to further discussions regarding the eight-point proposal, for which all terms must be agreed upon in order for the UNFC members to sign the NCA.
- RCSS announced on July 14 plans to hold national-level ethnicity based political dialogue in October or November, in view of the third UPC. Before the last UPC, RCSS was denied the possibility to hold such discussions by the government.
- A dialogue on federalism on July 15 in Rangoon gathered over 100 participants, majority of whom were university students. The necessity to spread awareness of federalism mechanisms and principles was discussed.
- On July 19, Burma commemorated the 70th Martyr's Day, marking the death of independence leader General Aung San, seven of his cabinet members and his bodyguard on July 19, 1947.
- A Committee for Shan State Unity (CSSU) meeting due to take place in Chiang Mai on July 20-22 was cancelled after objections from BA attaché in Bangkok. The meeting aimed to discuss the May 21CPC and gather perspectives from the different Shan actors. The RCSS responded that by banning the meeting, BA was going against the terms of the NCA. This is the second time that a CSSU meeting is being prevented, and critics have stated that the BA is seeking to prevent Shan unity and protect the army's political authority.
- BA officials as well as twenty representatives from the eight NCA-signatory EAOs attended a program in the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The training focuses on providing aid to the representatives and to help them overcome various peace process challenges. Additional training sessions are planned for September and November.

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- A July 26 statement published by the BA Information Team declared the use of military ranks by non-state armed organizations illegal. The declaration notably targets all of the EAOs, which often use military ranks to designate some of its leaders and members.
- 20 civil society groups members, lawmakers, writers, press representatives and analysts, all experts and active in the current peace process, were invited by the NLD to attend an informal meeting and discussions at the NRPC on July 29 in Rangoon.
- 2008 CONSTITUTION - On July 4, five organizations met in Naypyidaw to prepare the submission of a lawsuit against the government to rewrite the 2008 Constitution. The District Court ruled on July 18 that it was not under its jurisdiction to abolish the constitution. The lawsuit was then refused by the Mandalay Region high court on July 25. The group intends to pursue the lawsuit until the Union Supreme Court. On July 15, the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society confirmed they would be creating a new political party focused on reforming the 2008 Constitution.

## ARMED CONFLICT AND ABUSE

### *Northern Burma - Kachin and Shan States*

- SHRF documented arbitrary detention, torture and looting of villagers by BA troops and local pro-government militia between Feb and April 2017. In one incident, six Ta'ang (Palaung) villagers were interrogated, beaten and forced to dig "graves" and bury themselves up to their chest for one hour.
- Between July 2 and 8, clashes intensified between the BA and KIA in western and southwestern KIA-controlled areas of Kachin State.
- A BA imposed ban on trade for the last two months has led rice prices to rise. Checkpoints by BA around Tanai prevent the import of rice, oil and other food products. The ban is meant to prevent KIO from using any of the village resources to support their operations.
- At least two villagers were killed when the BA launched artillery shells at TNLA positions in Kutkhai Township. Another 300 villagers have fled their homes after a week of hostilities (starting June 26). TNLA also exchanged gunfire with the RCSS in Namtu. Between July 4 and 7, clashes intensified between the TNLA, BA and RCSS, displacing over 270.
- On June 24, BA had arbitrarily detained and tortured an estimated 250 civilians from Namshan Township in northern Shan State, accusing them of supporting the TNLA. Villagers later found the body of 32-year-old Kyaw Aung, one of the men who had been taken by the BA soldiers.
- During the first week of July, BA distributed leaflets to Lashio residents warning them of an imminent terrorist attack by KIA and TNLA. The leaflets contained details on the planned attack as well as pictures depicting alleged murdered and tortured victims of the EAOs. The BA then set up patrols in armored vehicles in the town. A spokesperson from the KIA denied the facts and accused the BA of leading a misinformation campaign to confuse residents.
- Two TNLA members were shot and arrested (one of them killed) on July 10 by the BA in Namkhan Township after being suspected of extorting money. TNLA denied the accusations, stating the men were charged with levying taxes in the TNLA-controlled area. Reports of increased taxing practices by the TNLA have been made by residents of Lashio Township. It is likely that the BA is seeking to cut off the TNLA from their tax revenues.

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- A man was seriously injured after stepping on a landmine in northern Shan State's Namtu Township on July 10. It is not known who had laid the mine.
- After two months free of armed confrontations, a new clash between the NCA signatory RCSS/SSA-S and BA occurred on July 14. RCSS asserted that BA had crossed into their territory without giving prior notice. Observers commented that the clash likely occurred due to a lack of clear demarcation between the different controlled areas.
- Chinese troops took positions along the China-Burma border on July 25, anticipating clashes between the BA and the TNLA on the border townships. The Northern Alliance (TNLA, KIA, MNDAA and AA) stated that no attack of a sufficient magnitude to affect China had been planned.
- Fortify Rights and Human Rights Watch said in a statement July 25 that Burma authorities should immediately and unconditionally release two ethnic Kachin Baptist leaders who have been arbitrarily detained since December 14, 2016, facing criminal charges for guiding journalists who reported on BA airstrikes in northern Shan State.

## ***Western Burma – Arakan and Chin State***

- Five Chin youth from different organisations sent a letter on July 4 to the Chin State chief minister detailing violations perpetrated by BA and AA in Paletwa township, Chin State. Alleged violations included physical assault, forceful recruitment as porters or guides, robberies and the use of residents as human shields.
- On July 4, one Rohingya Muslim man was killed and six were wounded after being attacked by a mob of Arakanese Buddhists in state's capital Sittwe. 14 Political Parties, including the Burma Army-backed USDP, issued a joint statement calling for the declaration of Martial Law and an emergency state (section 143(b) of the Constitution) in Western Burma.
- Around 200 people from Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships in Arakan State organized a public meeting on July 6 to discuss security issues. During the discussion, the possibility of forming a militia was evoked.
- Three Rohingya people (aged 14, 17 and 60) were killed by a landmine explosion while farming a rice paddy on July 15. A 12 year old boy was also injured and taken to the hospital.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

### ***Environmental and land issues***

- The UWSA began confiscating farmland and 32 homes belonging to ethnic Lahu villagers in eastern Shan State in early July for a new development project. No compensation was offered to the evicted families.
- 300 farmers undertook a 7-day protest beginning July 7 at the foot of Mandalay hill, demanding the government return seized fields and protect them from prosecutions over property disputes. Over 400 farmers in the region are being sued.
- On July 13, Vice President Henry Van Thio returned over 300 acres of confiscated farmland in Mandalay back to local farmers. The land had been confiscated by the Ministry of Health and Sports.

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- The Mon State Complaint and Appeal Letter Review and Assessment Committee revealed July 26 that the most common issues brought before the Mon State Parliament were land disputes.
- By July 12, around 1,300 signatures had been collected in since June 28 in Karen State for a petition against the construction of a coal-fired power plant. Community members and local environmental groups have raised concerns about the potential impact of coal plant emissions, including air pollution and public health issues.
- HURFOM has documented local complaints over declining fish populations since the construction of the cement factory and the coal fired power plant in the Mon State. The factory and the power plant began full operations in early 2017 despite large-scale protests by local communities who had not been told about the coal power plant that would provide power to the factory.

## ***Unlawful Association Act – The case of Lawi Weng, U Aye Naing, and U Pyae Bone Naing***

- On July 2, the case of Lawi Weng, Aye Nai and Pyae Phone Aung was transferred to Namhsan Township Court. The three journalists remain remanded in Hsipaw Prison, Shan State.
- An impromptu remand hearing was called on July 7 in Hsipaw township court. The trial was delayed again from July 11 to July 21, then rescheduled again to July 28 during another impromptu remand hearing held in Hsipaw on July 18.
- U Aye Nai was allowed to speak publicly for the first time since his arrest on July 18. He said: “We were arrested and then interrogated for more than 24 hours, maybe about 48 hours, by infantry battalion 503.”
- Amnesty International called for the immediate release of the three journalists on July 27. Its statement read: “It is exactly in northern Shan State and other ethnic areas wracked by conflict, where appalling human rights abuses are rife, that independent journalism is needed the most.”
- The trial began on July 28 by taking testimony from the case’s plaintiff, a BA major. The defendants’ legal counsel submitted bail requests on the same day, but the court did not rule on that motion. Out of nine witnesses lined up by the prosecution, only one gave testimony on the day.

## ***Section 66(d) 2013 Telecommunications Law***

- The Voice Daily editor Kyaw Min Swe was charged on June 2 with defamation for criticizing a military propaganda film.
- A joint statement was issued on July 3 by 61 national and international human rights organisations, urging the Burma government and parliament to repeal Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law 2013, and to decriminalize defamation.
- DASSK announced at a news conference on July 6 that the government was considering amendments to section 66(d).
- The Coalition on the Movement for Telecommunication Law Reform and Section 66(d) Abolition, a coalition of 22 CSOs, launched an online campaign called “OurVoiceOurParliament against Section 66(d)” on July 13 to abolish section 66(d).
- On July 13, Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Transport and Communications Kyaw Myo submitted a draft bill to amend the Telecommunications Law to the Upper House of the

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Parliament, in response to the high volume of complaints and the growing number of people being wrongly accused. In a statement dated July 18, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said the amendments falls short of the changes needed to guarantee press freedom. Members of Burma's Upper House of Parliament sat in session July 26 to debate changes to Telecommunications Act.

- On July 24, a court in Rangoon accepted the lawsuit against Kyaw Min Swe.
- Myanmar Now Chief Editor Ko Swe Win was arrested at Rangoon International Airport on July 30, also charged under section 66(d), accused of insulting ultranationalist monk U Wirathu.

## ***Calling for media freedom***

- On July 4, the European Union Delegation issued a statement in agreement with the EU Heads of Mission in Burma in support of media freedom.
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reiterated its call for the unconditional release of Lawi Weng, Aye Nai and Pyae Phone Aung, and the repeal of section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Act. RSF is one of 61 human rights groups that have issued a joint appeal to the government to repeal the article in the 2013 Act. Burma is ranked in the bottom third of the RSF's 2017 World Press Freedom Index—131<sup>st</sup> out of 180 countries.
- The the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) on July 19 called for immediate release of the three journalists arrested in northern Shan state in June and to repeal section 66(d).
- On July 27, the Southern Myanmar Journalists Network launched a campaign in support of freedom of expression. Journalist members of the network distributed pamphlets in Moulmein to promote public awareness of journalists detained under the Unlawful Associations Act and the Telecommunications Law.

## ***International community involvement***

- Six UN delegates arrived in Sittwe, Arakan State, on July 2 and visited the Dapaing IDP camp. The delegates met with border police in Maungdaw on July 3 and visited villages that suffered arson during BA security clearance operations in October 2016. They also met with DASSK and several Union ministers in Naypyidaw on July 5.
- On July 11, US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, piled pressure on Burma to accept the UN fact-finding mission. Human Rights Watch also expressed concern over the government refusing to grant visas to members of the fact-finding mission. Burma Government has repeatedly said they would allow access to the commission.
- UN special rapporteur Yanghee Lee made her sixth visit, a 12-day trip, to Burma on July 9 amid what she recognised as an "escalating security situation," also expressing frustrations at government restrictions on her team. She met with CSOs, IDPs and local authorities in Arakan State, Shan CSOs in northern Shan State, and Karen CSOs in Hpa-an, Karen State.
- Yanghee Lee called on the government to stop using old tactics previously used by the military regime, such as surveillance and restrictions on access, and urged for more international actors to support the country's democratic transition.