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## ACRONYM DICTIONARY

AA Arakan Army  
AAPP Assistance Association for Political Prisoners  
ABSDF All Burma Students' Democratic Front  
ALA Arakan Liberation Army  
ARSA Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army  
ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations  
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  
DKBA Democratic Karen Buddhist Army  
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  
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross  
IDP Internally Displaced Person  
IOM International Organization for Migration  
JICM Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting  
JMC Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee  
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  
UNESCO The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
UNFC United Nationalities Federal Council  
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund  
UNHRC United Nations Human Rights Council  
UPC Union Peace Conference  
UPDJC Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee

# PEACE & CONFLICT UPDATE – SEPTEMBER 2017

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UNGA United Nations General Assembly  
USDP Union Solidarity and Development Party  
UWSA Untied Wa State Army  
WFP World Food Programmes  
WLB Women's League of Burma  
21CPC 21st Century Panglong Conference

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## SEPTEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

- International food aid to IDP camps in southeast Burma stopped as of September 30. These include Karen IDP camp Ei Thu Hta and four Shan IDP camps with a total population of over 8,000 people. [Read about Burma Link's "Keep Supporting" campaign here.](#)
  - After ARSA attacked police and army outposts in Arakan State on August 25, clearance operations by security forces have resulted in 500,000 mainly Rohingya civilians fleeing Burma. Rohingya sources estimate that more than 5,000 have been killed.
  - 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. BA and BGF (under BA command) also clashed with a splinter group of the DKBA in Karen State, forcing 500 villagers into already overcrowded IDP camps. The NSCN-K confronted the Indian Army's Eastern Command in Nagaland.
  - BA continued to abuse the rights of ethnic civilians. In Kachin State, BA shot and killed a 28-year old civilian working in his rice field, continued extorting money and seizing possessions of local villagers, and fired mortar shells in a village. In the Shan State, BA abuse reported in September included killings, torture, and arbitrary arrest of civilians.
  - Over 10,000 locals from three townships in Kachin State protested against an expansion project in Mt. Hkakabo Razi National Park due to concerns over land loss. The expansion aims to make the park the first UNESCO Natural World Heritage site in Burma.
  - BA dropped charges against the six men charged under the Unlawful Association Act in June, including two reporters from the DVB and one from The Irrawaddy.
  - UK has suspended military training courses with the BA, and the US has cancelled plans to expand cooperation, in light of the recent developments in Arakan (Rakhine) State.
  - DASSK gave a public and national address in Naypyidaw on September 19, in response to international concerns regarding the crisis in Arakan State. The first public UNSC meeting on Burma was held this month for the first time in 8 years.
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## SITUATION IN THE ARAKAN (RAKHINE) STATE

### *Summary of the events*

On August 25, Rohingya insurgents belonging to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked around 30 police and army outposts in Arakan State, causing security forces to immediately respond with a large-scale counter-offensive. Whilst 'clearance operations' by the Burma Army and security forces in November 2016 also led to large scale grave human rights abuses directed at the Rohingya Muslim population, the events of August 25 sparked an unprecedented wave of departure as the population immediately started fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh. At least 500,000 Rohingya have fled Burma, with around 40% of their villages burnt to the ground or left empty. Rohingya sources estimate 5,000 or more people have been killed. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in his opening address to the UNHRC that the situation seemed a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing." Meanwhile, much of Burma's majority Burmans (and many representatives of ethnic nationalities) refer to Rohingya as "Bengalis" – illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The international community has loudly criticised Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's silence on the issue and a UN fact finding mission has been commissioned to investigate the situation.

### *Domestic and international response*

- The President's Office issued a statement September 12 announcing the new Committee for the Implementation of Recommendations on Arakan State. The committee will comprise 15 members and chaired by the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr. Win Myat Aye.
- DASSK chose not to attend the UNGA session this month to focus on "domestic issues". Instead, she gave her first public and national address in Naypyidaw on September 19. Many international observers were left unsatisfied with her address of the crisis and subsequently expressed heavy criticism of DASSK and the NLD government. Second Vice President U Henry Van Thio addressed the UNGA in DASSK's stead on September 20.
- The first public UNSC meeting on Burma was held for the first time in 8 years, during which UNSG Antonio Guterres gave a briefing. During the meeting, Russia and China expressed strong support of Burma, while the US, France and Britain called for an immediate end to the violence. Nikki Haley, the US Ambassador to the UN, called for countries to suspend the provision of weapons to Burma until sufficient accountability mechanisms are in place in regards to the BA. While the US has not called for the renewal of sanctions, this was the first time the US has called for the punishment of military leaders for their role in Arakan crisis. Burma National Security Adviser Thaung Tun defended the country's handling of the ongoing crisis in the face of strong international criticism. He insisted that there had been no ethnic cleansing in the region and qualified allegations of BA abuses as 'malicious and unsubstantiated'.
- Britain on September 19 suspended training courses for the BA, "recognising the seriousness of the situation" in Arakan State. 157 British MPs had written to the Foreign Secretary calling for an end to the training, and an online campaign on AVAAZ had received 1.5 million signatures opposing the training. The US also cancelled plans to expand military relations.

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- The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) in Kuala Lumpur declared on September 22 that the Burma government is guilty of genocide against Rohingya Muslims and crimes against humanity against Kachin people. This represents the first use of "genocide" by international jurists in relation to the situation in Arakan State. The PPT ruling is not legally binding and serves as an opinion tribunal, but it will submit its findings to other international actors.
- On September 29, the UN Human Rights Council extended the UN fact-finding mission's mandate by six months, until September 2018.

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## DISPLACEMENT UPDATE

### *Long standing international support stops for Karen and Shan IDP camps*

According to the Shan State Refugee Committee, six IDP camps along the Shan-Thailand border, which have existed for up to 18 years and house 6,200 IDPs, saw food aid and other humanitarian support cut at the end of September. The IDPs cannot return home because of continued BA military operations meaning civilians are still at risk of abuse. Many original villages of Shan refugees and IDPs have also been destroyed or are occupied by the BA, government militias or the UWSA.

Food assistance to Karen IDP camp Ei Htu Hta also ceased at the end of September. The camp supporting committee has been campaigning for support and assistance for some 3,000 IDPs who wish to stay within the camp, explaining that many IDPs could not return home as BA is still based in and around their villages (among other concerns).

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

1,000 IDPs from Tanai Township, displaced because of fighting between the BA and KIA in June 2017, want to return, but fear BA soldiers who are fortifying outposts near their homes. Their concerns had been expressed on September 8 through the Kachin Peace Network to BA officials, but BA officials replied they had "no reason to withdraw the military outposts". The IDPs are due to face a shortage of food rations by the end of September. They are currently being sheltered in churches under the authority of the KBC and the Catholic Church, as the BA has opposed the establishment of a new camp.

10-15 members of the NLD's newly formed 'Central Women's Committee' (formed this August 2017) are due to visit Kachin IDP camps starting October 4 and will donate various food and sanitary products, and also provide medical services over the course of a week. Eight camps will be visited across Myitkyina, Waingmaw, Mohnyin and Mogaung Townships.

### *Thailand-Burma border*

Armed conflict between the BA and BGF (under BA command) and the splinter group of the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) in Hlaingbwe Township, Karen State, forced 500 more villagers into already overcrowded IDP camps. A shelter official said this is placing a huge strain on food

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supplies and the camp is struggling to feed everyone. Higher-level officials are reportedly refusing to accept more people, although shelter officials on the ground are allowing newcomers to enter the camp for shelter without registration.

Mae La refugee camp was partially quarantined for at least 14 days after a H1N1 camp patient passed away on August 31. Residents were able to leave and re-enter but NGO staff entrance was restricted.

Members of refugee and IDP assistance groups such as TBC attended a public seminar “Syria to Myanmar: Who are Refugees?” organised by the US Embassy in Thailand and Chiang Mai University on September 13.

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## PEACE PROCESS

Although both the NMSP and BA have met amid escalating tensions and both have withdrawn troops from fighting, villagers in areas controlled by the NMSP remain concerned. BA battalion units have been reported to stop and question locals passing near the Three Pagoda Pass.

A meeting was called between the UPDJC, JMC, PPST and the eight NCA-signatory EAOs in Chiang Mai on September 4-7 with over 70 delegates in attendance. The objective of the meeting was to speed up the work of the UPDJC, JMC and PPST, and develop a common policy between the EAOs.

Chairman of the RCSS/SSA, Gen. Yawd Serk, met DASSK in Naypyidaw on September 11. He stated that although the RCSS/SSA had signed the NCA with the previous government, ‘misunderstandings’ on the ground have led to armed clashes. A press statement released by DASSK’s Office outlined that the meeting points included confidence and trust-building in the peace process and the development of ethnic inhabited areas. Gen. Yawd Serk also talked with the deputy commander-in-chief. The BA and RCSS/SSA-S agreed to avoid new clashes in order to ease military tensions.

The International Karen Organisation (IKO) held its first conference on September 6-8 in Melbourne, Australia. A subsequent statement called for a review of the peace process and said that the NCA, to which the KNU abides, favors the government at the expense of the party’s position.

A “Business for Peace” forum was held in Hpa-an, Karen State, on September 14, and was attended by members of the state’s government, EAOs and NGOs, and local administrators, with over 500 attendees in total. Speaking at the forum, the Karen State Minister of Planning, Finance and Municipal Affairs, Than Naing, declared the state to be “stable” and said that there have been positive outcomes for Karen EAOs who have collaborated with the government and foreign companies in business opportunities.

A “Women’s Forum for Peace” was also held in Hpa-an, Karen State, from September 19 to 21 to commemorate the International Day of Peace on September 21 and to share women’s experiences relating to peace, security, displacement, and violence. There were more than 400 women in attendance, and organisations that attended include the WLB, the Gender Equality Network and the Women Organisation Network.

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On September 25, the PC met with the DPN in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for informal talks after several delays due to the ongoing crisis in Arakan State. The 7<sup>th</sup> round of formal talks has been twice delayed this month and is now set for mid-October.

The NLD party celebrated its 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary on September 27 and took the opportunity to reinstate its commitment to democracy, peace and a Federal Union in Burma.

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## ARMED CONFLICT AND ABUSE

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

On September 2, the BA requisitioned a truck from a Hai Khai villager, Ho Pong Township, and forced a village man to guide them. A village secretary from Nam Khok village was detained and tortured on September 9-11.

On September 10, a clash broke out between the SSPP/SSA-N and the BA in Loi Ywel mountain, Shan State. The state government later sent a letter to the SSPP headquarters in Wanhai, Kehsi Township, accusing the EAO of trespassing beyond its defined area of control as outlined in the state and union level ceasefires of 2012. A SSPP spokesperson confirmed reception of the letter but denied the accusation.

The TNLA alleged that a skirmish that occurred between their troops and the BA on September 11 in Kyaukme township, Shan State, was initiated by 100 BA soldiers. There have also been reports of an increase in troops in the area and an addition of two military operations commands. In total, an estimated 6,000 BA troops were reported active in Kyaukme, Mogok, Hsipaw, Namhsan, Namtu, Kutkai, Theinni, Muse and Namkham townships.

On September 13, skirmishes were sparked again when BA soldiers reportedly encroached on TNLA-controlled areas in Namtu, Namhsan and Kyawukme townships. There were BA casualties but none declared by TNLA.

On September 16, the KIA ambushed BA troops near Muse Township, Shan State.

There were reported clashes in Kutkai township on September 18 according to a TNLA situation report.

Six BA soldiers, including two officers, confessed to killing three Kachin IDP men kept in detention in a military court hearing on September 19 in Mansi, northern Kachin State. The men's wounds revealed they had been subjected to torture and shot dead.

The TNLA and local CSOs accused the BA of arresting and detaining five civilians in Namkham Township on September 17. Following negotiations with community elders, the BA released three villagers the same day and the remaining two the following day.

The KIA launched an offensive against the BA near Wa Kawng bridge, northern Shan State, on September 19.

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The BA fired several mortar rounds at KIA battalions on September 18 in Kachin State Hpakant Township; and September 21 in Kai Htik and Hka Pra.

Clashes occurred in several villages of Danai Township, Kachin State, notably Ting Kawk village, on September 18 and 22. During the September 18 attacks, the BA killed a 28-year old man from Ting Kawk village after arresting him while he was working in his rice field. Fellow villagers found his body with multiple gunshot wounds six days later.

Armed confrontations between the KIA and an unknown BA unit took place on September 24 at Kumtsai Yang village, Kachin State. According to local sources, several mortar shells were fired on the village by the BA, forcing villagers to flee and take refuge in a nearby church.

## ***Northwestern Burma / India – Nagaland***

On September 27, the NSCN-K – an armed Naga group fighting for the independence of Nagaland from India and Burma – targeted the Indian Army's Eastern Command in the Mon District of Nagaland. The Indian forces suffered no casualties, but it is reported many were recorded for the NSCN-K.

## ***Karen State***

A skirmish between the BA and DKBA occurred on September 2 and 3 in Mae Tha Wor, Karen State, when a DKBA splinter group allegedly attempted to reclaim a military post that was previously under their control. No casualties were reported.

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## **HUMAN RIGHTS AND VOICES FROM THE GROUND**

### ***Burma Army***

Residents of Nyaung Taw Village, Kachin State, have asked for the removal of a BA checkpoint in the area, which has been extorting money and seizing possessions of local villagers since August 11. Several appeals to local authorities have been unsuccessful, leading 224 residents to sign and submit a petition to the head of the Northern Command this September. Thus far, no effort to address or discuss the issue has been made by authorities or the BA.

Over 700 were stranded near Hpakant Township, Kachin State, on September 22 after the Burma Army blocked the roads claiming that the KIA was collecting taxes from vehicles nearby. Locals have confirmed that it is common for the KIA to collect taxes in the area and was reportedly active in Dun Bum and Lawa villages at the time. A similar blockage was organized by the BA near Tanai Township from September 16 to 18. Drivers have been forced to stay put for at least 3 days in such instances.

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

150 farmers from seven townships brought their individual land-grab complaint cases to the Shan State Hluttaw's (Parliament) Complaint Scrutiny Committee in Taunggyi on August 29, after failing at the Shan State government office level.



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The Mon State Hluttaw on September 6 voted in favour of cracking down on the Mawlamyine Cement Limited (MCL) cement factory in Kyaikmayaw township after it was discovered that the factory had been generating electricity without the approval of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy. As of the end of September, MCL has yet to receive a notion of censure from the Mon State government.

On September 12, a committee headed by Vice President Henry Van Thio returned more than 2,600 acres of unused confiscated land to around 300 farmers in Myaing Township, Magway Region.

Karen villagers brought a complaint case to the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, which convened to hear the complaint against three Thai companies connected to a Ban Chuang mine on September 11. The community complained that their agricultural land was illegally seized to support mining activities, and violations such as waste emissions resulting in illness and polluted water supplies, and the destruction of local livelihoods could impact around 16,000 people living in 22 villages surrounding the factory.

During an environmental conference in Lashio on September 23, Shan State, 100 local farmers and CSO members from 12 different Townships demanded the prevention of illegal pesticides and herbicides originating from China, as they damage the environment and affect people's health. One of the reasons explaining heavy chemical usage is due to locals' inability to read the instructions in Chinese language and use the products accordingly. A lack of regulation regarding the importation of pesticides is also problematic.

Around 9,700 local people from Putao; 1,800 from Machanbaw; and 1,200 from Naungmon protested in their respective townships in Kachin State on September 28 against an expansion project in Mt. Hkakabo Razi National Park aiming to make it the first UNESCO Natural World Heritage site in Burma. Concerns over land loss is the main issue raised by locals who depend on land to make a living. The Kachin Political Cooperation Committee (KPCC) already opposed the issue in a September 18 statement. It has cited a lack of transparency, compensation for locals, and environmental concerns.

In September, the Burma Government obtained US\$4.19 million from the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund – an international donor fund – to support a plan to redistribute vacant or fallow lands back to the people.

## ***Unlawful Association Act cases***

On September 1, the BA announced it would be dropping charges against the six men charged with "unlawful association" in June – among which were three reporters from DVB and The Irrawaddy – in order to further its "cooperative role in [Burma's] journey toward democracy". The defendants were released on bail and the case finally saw its conclusion on September 18, when the defendants were exonerated.

Another "unlawful association" case that had lasted for more than eight months and saw 27 hearings also ended on September 1. The defendant, Min Htay of the ABSDF, was acquitted of his charges, with the judge ruling that he was innocent of his charge of associating with the KIA.



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## ***Media freedom***

BBC Burma on September 4 ended its joint venture with Myanmar TV (MNTV) after MNTV censored or pulled various programmes put out by the BBC. An unnamed official at MNTV said they had objected to the BBC's use of the word "Rohingya" in their reporting.

## ***Migrants from Burma in Thailand***

International Justice Mission published a report on September 21, denouncing widespread human trafficking, exploitative recruitment and severe human rights abuse in the Thai fishing industry, which employs a large number of Burma nationals. Only 13% of the interviewed migrants reported fair labor conditions.

Excessively long queues have been reported at nationality verifications centers, as around 1,000 Burma citizens come each day to receive work certificates, as per the new Thailand labor laws enacted in June of this year. Additional staff is needed in order to process the high number of migrant workers.

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