BURMESE WOMEN'S UNION

Photo from Khit Thit Media

Sheroes Resist Against Dictators for Peace & Security

Analysis report of Women's situation from July to September 2021

29th October 2021

Introduction

In the eight months since the military coup of the 1st February 2021 Myanmar's economy and health care systems have been crippled and internal armed conflicts have been expending across the country. Since September 7th, the day the National Unity Government (NUG) announced a defensive war against the military junta by the National Unity Government (NUG), armed conflicts between local resistance forces and the military (SAC) have intensified in some states/ regions of Myanmar. Military arrests of civilians targeted women activists and youths, and the military has used artillery attacks on civilians during the armed conflicts. Within the armed conflict, the military is systematically suppressing women in their political resistance, including through the use of sexual abuse during detainments and interrogation.

Women have to gamble with their lives under the military dictatorship and collapsed heath care system, there is a general lack of physical security in the country. Women can be arrested anytime, anywhere and could be taken as hostages, as well as the ever-present threat of being caught in active conflict. Despite the extreme risk of being imprisoned, tortured, or killed, the women's hunger for peace inspires them to continue this revolution by leading strikes and organizing support for members of civil disobedience movement, and even taking up arms.

According to information from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and Burmese Women's Union (BWU), from February 1 to September 30, a total of 1267 women were arrested and 57 women were sentenced. In addition, 78 women were murdered by the military (SAC). The information presented here comes from credible

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sources collected by the BWU. BWU accepts the facts that the actual death rate and eradication of public property likely to be significantly higher.

Women in Political Conflicts

In civil wars and situations of political uncertainty, women and children suffer the most. In the period following the military coup, countless civilians were killed and injured due to artillery attacks, abandoned military weapons, and land mines in the villages. Among these deaths and injuries, there are women and children as young as 2 years old.

Some deaths were due to the lack of health care services during detentions and imprisonment. A woman named Khin Mar Cho who suffered from diabetes was arrested under the 505(B) law and detained by Minkin Police. During the detainment, she did not get permission to receive medical treatment and as a result, she died while in detention.[1] There are reports that there are many cases where the military has informed family members that such deaths during detention, imprisonment and interrogation were due to covid-19. Family members have lost the right to accurate information and face difficulties when trying to meet their detained family members.

One of the barbarous acts of military juntas is that a pregnant woman was arrested under the suspicion of being a member of a people's defense force (PDF). She gave birth at a village while under arrest, as soldiers were forcing her to walk to their station. As soon as she gave birth, she immediately had to carry on to the station; the soldiers forced the villagers to carry her.[2] Ma Soe Mi Mi Kyaw who was arrested on September 20th, tried to

[1] Khit Thit Media, July 22
https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1252839011820109

[2] Mizzima, Sep 29

kill herself by drinking methylated spirit due to torture during the interrogation. By scrutinizing her case, it is impossible to even imagine the level of torture women experience at the hands of the military junta, to acquire information during the interrogation process. Through the observation of several cases, it is found that the military is violating fundamental human rights through using torture and denying health care to detainees.

Sexual Violation

The military- appointed State Administrative Council (SAC) systematically suppressing women using sexual abuse as a weapon is no different from their tactics throughout history. In one case, a girl who was arrested by the military was sexually abuse by a higher rank officer in front of her father.[3] In another case, a 14 years old girl was raped by a group of military's members in Kani township which is currently facing internet cut off.[4]

BWU analysis shows that the military has continuously committed sexual abuse and now they are again suppressing women through sexual abuse in order to stop women from engaging in political activities.

Not only in prison, but also outside the prisons, travelling civilians including women face violence during inspection at military checkpoints. One IDP woman shared her experience[5].

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https://www.facebook.com/MizzimaDaily/posts/4821596634541870

[3] Myanmar Pressphoto Agency, Aug 24

https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/6054855867888723

[4] Khit Thit Media, Sep 26

https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1307566066347403

[5] Myanmar Pressphoto Agency, Aug 15

https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/6007622709278706

> "When I was on the way home, I met with them (the military). Then, they inspected my phone and questioned me where the others are. They pulled my hair, slapped my cheek. At that moment, a truck arrived. So, while they were checking that truck, I ran away. I didn't care if I died while running".

Military groups continuously threaten travelling civilians with their weapons, whether the civilians are male or female. Therefore, civilians especially women are encountering challenges such as the threats of sexual violence and physical insecurity when traveling.

Arbitrary Arrests by the Military (SAC)

During the military rule from July to September, there were more than 14 cases in which family members were taken/ arrested as hostages. The military arrested seemingly random people to take as hostages, including elders, women and children. Among those arrests, the wife and 2-year-old child of Kyaw Min Htunt, a human rights and environmental activist were arrested as hostages on the road on the 5th September.[6]

Figure 1: photo from Tribune India

The military suppresses civilians to scare them away from their resistance activities, through concealing information on detainees and through holding hostages, including children.

[6] Irrawaddy, Sep 5
https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2021/09/10/245871.html?fbclid=IwAR3GprzuGKU1xiFj-EYpuorHN23O6vrlEU_rt9nBbzTYZGdjw4kXWtZUqko

The military arrest innocent civilians including women to use as human shields in active armed conflict areas such as Karen and Kayah (Karenni) states. Three women from Karen state, Hparpon district, Tophoepardae village were arrested by LIB 341 and LIB 410 of the military forces and were used as human shields and forced to carry baggage.[7] Using civilians as human shields is a human rights crime. These cases indicate the facts that military only focus to sustain their regime instead of the country's development and stability. There is no doubt that the military would use any methods in order to legalize their power.

Women's Political activities

Although the military arrests civilians as hostages, arrest demonstrators and members of people's defense forces, hidden information of the detainees, and regularly use of torture, women are still leading peaceful protests today.

Women are not only resisting the current dictators but are simultaneously trying to eradicate conservative culture norms which hold women back. Socially constructed stereotypes situated women's longyis as low or dirty, reflecting women's supposed

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[7] Salween Press, Aug 23
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=4033149636796006&id=422055381238801

inferiority in terms of spiritual dignity. In the protests, women have been using their longyis as a symbol of resistance, chanting "our longyi, our flag, our victory"[8].

In today's spring revolution, women's iconic determination and courage are clearly visible through their activities. Although the military junta is arresting, killing, shooting civilians, women political participation could not be stopped. Women are still leading strikes the

Figure 2: Photo form Myanmar Labour News

Figure 3: Photo from Khit Thit Media

months of July, August, and September. During these three months, women led strikes such as "eradicate dictators with our care-giver hand"[9], "Women who will grind military, three fingers behind the bar"[10], "crush the rapist military with our glory"[11] and so on.

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[8] Khit Thit Media, July 21
https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1252383678532309

[9] Khit Thit Media, Jul 16
https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1248324992271511

[10] Myanmar Labour News, Sep 7
https://www.facebook.com/myanmarlabournews/posts/626765898709138

[11] Myanmar Pressphoto Agency, Aug 24
https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/6053814141326229

In addition, some women joined military training in people's defense forces to resist against military dictators. There are 51 women who have initiated military training in the People Revolution Army (PRA).

Myanmar women leaders are gaining international recognition for their important work. Ei Thinzar Maung (Deputy Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affair of National Unity Government) and Esther Ze Naw were in the Time Magazine 2021 list of 100 as well as NASA scientist Dr. Daw Mi Mi Aung who was born in Myanmar. The top Myanmar actress, Eaindra Kyaw Zin who actively participated in demonstrations against military dictatorship, and is currently in jail, has received the Best Performance Award at Germany's Oldenburg International Film Festival. The women's rights and Rohingya activist, Wai Wai Nu received the Athens Democracy Award 2021. These exceptional women influence and inspire other women and women's organizations to persevere in this situation of turmoil.

Women and the Collapsing Health Care System

Since the military coup, the health care system has been in collapse and the military appointed regime has been unable or unwilling to control the covid-19. As the health care system collapsed, women particularly pregnant women lost their access to hospital care. Due to a lack of hospitalization, nine pregnant women died in Rakhine[12] and other pregnant women passed away in other states and divisions too. A pregnant woman shared that[13]

[12] Development Media Group, Aug 16
https://hiburma.net/2021/08/%E1%80%80%E1%80%AD%E1%80%AF%E1%80%97%E1%80%85%E1%80%BA%E1%80%80%E1%80%AC%E1%80%9C%E1%80%80%E1%80%AD%E1%80%AF-%E1%80%81%E1%80%80%E1%80%BA%E1%80%81%E1%80%B2%E1%80%85%E1%80%BD%E1%80%AC-%E1%80%96%E1%80%BC/?fbclid=IwAR2U1AXq0J-wlhQjD3VjeCKu50QqMcUz_a3VJwBehR4GwoxTAhJILMp7UA4

[13] HI, Aug 16

"During the pandemic, pregnant mothers like us were far from health care. We need to boost our immune system to resist Covid-19, but we can't afford to buy healthy food. If I am sick, I am scared that my baby will be affected too. Whenever I think about it, I just

Figure 4: Photo from MMTimes

Women and pregnant mothers are suffering for a living in this pandemic and also facing challenges on daily basic due to the rise of commodities' price in the country. In addition, women and children were unable to get vaccinations since the military coup[14]. By oppressing women and children, the military is only leading to reinforce their regime.

IDPs' Situation

As a result of the military coup and the barbarous acts of the military junta, civilians are taking up arms to defend themselves and their communities against the military dictators. Consequently, armed conflicts are expanding across the country and civilians are being forced to flee and become IDPs. In September, armed conflicts escalate in Kayah (Karenni) state, and the IDPs who had just returned to their houses again had to flee. Sudden attacks

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https://hiburma.net/2021/08/%E1%80%80%E1%80%AD%E1%80%AF%E1%80%97%E1%80%85%E1%80%BA%E1%80%80%E1%80%AC%E1%80%9C%E1%80%80%E1%80%AD%E1%80%AF-%E1%80%81%E1%80%80%E1%80%BA%E1%80%81%E1%80%B2%E1%80%85%E1%80%BD%E1%80%AC-%E1%80%96%E1%80%BC/?fbclid=IwAR2U1AXg0J-wlhOjD3VjeCKu50OqMcUz_a3VIwBehR4GwoxTAhJILMp7UA4

[14] RFA, July 9 https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=324405329202785

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by military prompted civilians to flee at night. While fleeing, some civilians died due to accidents. In one case, a motorbike crashed into a car and an eight-year-old girl died on the spot.[15]

Meanwhile, the number of Covid-19 patients is increasing in several IDP camps. IDPs are in need of food and general health medicines while also facing the challenges of the pandemic. In IDP camps of Kayah (Karenni) state, there were more than additional 190 Covid-19 patients in September. These IDP communities are in need of Covid-19 testing kits and medicines for the immune system.

Additionally, humanitarian access to the IDP camps in Rakhine State and other states/regions has been increasingly blocked. The military junta arresting drivers who transport food to the IDP camps and blocking roads to transfer humanitarian aid and giving strict inspections to anyone travelling. Therefore, humanitarian aid has not reached the people who need it. In active-conflict areas in Kayah (Karenni) state, IDP camps only have two weeks of food supply left, due to the halt on transportation.[16] As a result, this leaves into the situation which threats of food supplies in some IDP camps. Additionally, women are in need of sanitary pads in Rakhine which has about 40,000 women IDPs[17] and other states.

Women's Struggles to Live

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[15] PKPF, Sep 8
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1250568231997 27&id=103194852052591

[16] Kantarawaddy Times, Sep 28
https://www.kantarawaddytimes.org/?p=13892&fbclid=IwAR1TGLttmHaiQ6PMEUhroa10VjhoUfq4ZCOhmjbfaOGucgQBC2ZATw41lQo

[17] Development Media Group, Sep 4
https://www.facebook.com/dmgnewsagency/posts/2101558199996580

Myanmar's economy has fallen during the pandemic and military coup. In addition, the inflation rate and unemployment rate are also increasing. This economic crisis is impacting civilians and driving many to attempt to go abroad for work, including women. Large numbers of people are lining up to get a passport. Some families and women did not get a passport so they are forced to cross the border illegally. However, many are caught by border guards and sent back.

Due to inflation, the value of Myanmar currency is also dropping every day. This results a rise in the price of commodities including basic food needs. This has greatly impacted housewives on a daily basis, and made it difficult for them to afford daily food for them and their families.

Figure 5: Photo from Google

Many garment factories which employed large numbers of girls/women, have been shut down. This left those women and girls with limited economic options, with some ending up in sex work. Hence, the prostitution market could grow in a short period of time[18]. In some cases, some women are managing their financial issues by engaging in sex work.

[18] Zalen Media, Jul 22
https://www.zalen.info/%E1%80%A1%E1%80%AC%E1%80%8F%E1%80%AC%E1%80%9E%E1%80%AD%E1%80%99%E1%80%BA%E1%80%B8%E1%80%99%E1%80%BE%E1%80%AF%E1%80%80%E1%80%BC%E1%80%B1%E1%80%AC%E1%80%84%E1%80%B7%E1%80%BA-%E1%80%80%E1%80%BC%E1%80%AF/?fbclid=IwAR1eEW6Bpnf4Hrro5_sLonRetNo1qYCnT72J913GBiHmI8ob8ZbfmHOaJ7k

Conclusion

The impacts of the military coup are wreaking havoc on different of sectors of the country and the military-appointed SAC is committing crimes against humanity and oppressing civilians, including through arresting innocent civilians including elders, women and children. Meanwhile, the military claims that Myanmar could become a prosperous country and even overtake Singapore if citizens were united.

Since the military coup, Myanmar's economy, health care and education systems have been decimated and the numbers of IDPs and unemployed workers are rapidly rising. Women are facing particular challenges in this economic crisis and trying to solve them in any possible way, to provide for their families. Roads for the delivery of humanitarian aid are blocked by the military, so aid often does not reach to the IDPs.

Children are killed by landmines and artillery attacks by the military junta. Women are not treated any differently than men regarding arrests and face the additional threat of sexual violence during the interrogation process and detention. Women are targeted in order to scare them away from political participation. Due to the military's continuing brutality, larger numbers of civilians find it impossible to accept them as a governing force. No matter how much the military is suppressing women away from political activities, women continuously lead strikes against the dictators in any way they can, all over the country, showing their immense resilience and moral fortitude. BWU would like to present this analysis concluding that, despite unbelievable challenges and risks, diverse women all over Myanmar are continuously leading strikes against the dictators, and staying true to their resolute political principles and hunger for peace.

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