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BHRN strongly condemns the Junta's forcible evictions through mass destructions of civilians' homes

The Burmese military is forcibly evicting civilians as they have struggled to face popular uprisings for more than a year since the coup. The military has overthrown a democratically elected government, committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, according to the UN fact-finding mission. The junta has always oppressed people through multiple tactics, such as mass killings, burning homes, abductions, and imprisonment of innocent civilians. They have done this after every coup with the excuse of restoring rule and order during the crises. They are now carrying out clearance operations by destroying civilians' homes in Yangon's Hlaing Thar Yar township, Rakhine State's capital Sittwe and various towns in the Mandalay region, such as Mandalay, Pyin Oo Lwin, and Myit Ngwe.

On 5th March, the junta issued an eviction notice that ordered residents of Myitnge in the Mandalay region to remove their homes within three days for not having proper tenancy documents. It targeted residents from seven out of 13 wards in the town, including over 2000 households with small-scale shops and the staff dormitories of Myanmar Railway (MR). Myitnge has been the home for MR staff members since the British colonial time. According to local sources, BHRN learned that residents paid fees to every successive government for their tenancy. After the coup, the MR staff joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Local people said that the junta targeted CDM staff initially. Later, they also pressured civilians' homes in the wards to be removed; thus, they had to destroy their homes by themselves. People who could not demolish their properties before the junta forces arrived can face forceful destruction by bulldozers from the military. On 7th March, the junta's people broadcasted a message across the town, which stated that anyone who let the evicted CDM staff stay at their homes would face charges from the military. It mentioned that the army would seal off those homes as penalties.

The junta removed over 70 homes in the railway ward of Sittwe in Rakhine state on 9th March and evicted about 200 houses in the Arr Jaik Daw Kone cemetery in the same city on 10th March.

The junta also sent eviction notices to 133 shops in Ba Htoo Stadium and 95 shops in Aung Myay Mandalay stadium in Mandalay, and 162 shops in the stadium in Pyin Oo Lwin to be removed by 31-3-2022 at the latest.

"The fascist military is using a very cunning tactic – eliminating a demographic of the population that resists the coup. To do so, the Junta has been bombing several villages in ethnic-controlled areas and evicting homes in the outskirts of big cities. However, disrupting a demographic of the population that is strongly resisting the coup could create huge pressure on the uprising to continue," said BHRN's executive director U Kyaw Win.

From October to December 2021, the junta claimed the residential areas and shops in eastern Hlaing Thar Yar were squatters and forcefully removed them and destroyed the properties with bulldozers. As a result, thousands of people became homeless. Local sources said those lands have commercial projects related to companies with close ties to the junta.

More than 100,000 households and 450,000 people received smart cards (squatter identity cards) under the previous civilian government in Yangon. Among them, more than 38,000 households are from Hlaing Thar Yar township.

Such forceful evictions by the junta breach humanitarian norms and violate Burmese citizens' fundamental civil and human rights. BHRN concludes that the military's practices of favoring its cronies and supporters with economic opportunities by oppressing innocent civilians are a significant barrier to nurturing human rights and democratic culture in Burma for both long and short terms.

The international community should not ignore the junta's gross violations of the civil and human rights of the people in Burma and should hold them accountable for their crimes. We urge the international community to protect innocent civilians' lives and households and assist in their struggles for democracy and human rights in Myanmar. The international community cannot neglect the crisis in Burma anymore as it is becoming a security threat for the region. A global arms embargo and tougher economic sanctions must be imposed on the Burmese military, preventing them from further committing atrocities against their people.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

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