

# STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

## AUGUST 2021 REPORT

**Summary.** This report reviews the August 2021 developments relating to human rights in Myanmar.

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## **I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance**

On August 1, coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing appointed himself prime minister of his military government, the State Administration Counsel, following in the footsteps of former dictator Ne Win, who ruled the country for 26 years.<sup>1</sup> He also announced that elections would be held by 2023.<sup>2</sup> However, the promise for new elections by 2023 was met with skepticism from opponents of the regime.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly 1,000 civilians have been killed by Myanmar regime forces in fewer than 200 days as the junta continues its crackdown to quell opposition to the February 1 coup.<sup>4</sup> In the last month alone, at least 92 civilians were slaughtered by the regime including teenagers, student activists, protesters, National League for Democracy (“NLD”) members and their family members, bystanders, pedestrians and villagers, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an activist group that monitors arrests and fatalities at the hands of the junta’s forces.<sup>5</sup> The regime has also detained around 150 civilians, including young activists, elected NLD lawmakers and striking civil servants, between August 14 and 24, as it continues its crackdown on the opposition, according to a report by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.<sup>6</sup>

Myanmar’s military regime has launched a series of raids to sweep up and arrest civilians in Yangon after the city saw a surge in recent attacks against the junta.<sup>7</sup> Since early August, the country’s commercial hub has witnessed a series of bombings and deadly gun attacks against security forces and their associates in several of the city’s townships.<sup>8</sup> The arrests came a day after a hit-and-run attack against security forces at the former Myanmar Radio and Television compound.<sup>9</sup> After an exchange of gunfire, one soldier was killed and several others were wounded, according to local media who cited witnesses at the scene.<sup>10</sup> On August 19, the military beat and arrested at least 15 people during raids in Yangon, while also looting shops and offices.<sup>11</sup>

A series of explosions rocked at least 12 locations in Yangon and Mandalay regions on August 29 and 30, including offices of the NLD party and the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (“USDP”).<sup>12</sup> On August 30, blasts occurred at around eight locations in five of Yangon’s townships: Insein, Kamayut, Sanchaung, South Okkalapa and North Okkalapa. Most of the explosions occurred at traffic police booths at junctions in the city.<sup>13</sup> No casualties were reported.<sup>14</sup> Three NLD offices in Mandalay Region’s Maha Aung Myay Township were the target of a blast on August 29 soon after being raided by junta forces, according to local media.<sup>15</sup>

The bodies of around 40 people killed by junta soldiers were found in the resistance stronghold of Kani Township in Sagaing Region in July, according to residents.<sup>16</sup> “Junta troops raided our villages. We fled and found corpses when we came back to the villages. Nearly 40 bodies were found in July. Most recently we found 12 charred bodies in Taung Pauk,” a Kani resident told *The Irrawaddy*.<sup>17</sup> Kani on the Chindwin River is around 50km from Monywa, the regional capital. The township has seen several massacres as the junta scaled up military

operations against the resistance.<sup>18</sup> The onslaught forced more than 7,000 residents from at least four villages to flee their homes.<sup>19</sup> The military has not yet responded to questions about the killings in Kani.<sup>20</sup> “The military regime might say they were armed rebels but they were not shot in shootouts. They all bore signs of torture and the bodies were intentionally hidden. It is a war crime,” said a lawyer.<sup>21</sup>

Hundreds of residents of at least 10 villages in Sagaing Region were forced to flee their homes after junta forces raided their villages over two days, according to local villagers.<sup>22</sup> Regime forces raided Nyaunghla and Wegyi villages in Tabayin Township, Sagaing Region on August 8 and arrested a number of residents.<sup>23</sup> They ransacked shops selling phones and groceries and set fire to over 20 motorbikes belonging to supporters of the National League for Democracy (“NLD”), said locals.<sup>24</sup> Military regime forces also raided Namyar and Marakan villages on August 9, setting a gas station on fire in Marakan, said residents.<sup>25</sup>

On August 21, a married couple was shot dead by junta forces in Khin-U Township, Sagaing Region, according to local media.<sup>26</sup> Maung Aye, a farmer and seller of agricultural chemicals, and his wife, Nwe Nwe Aye, a nurse, were targeted by security forces between Khin-U town and Kan Tharyar Village.<sup>27</sup> Junta forces gunned down the couple after they allegedly refused to stop at a military checkpoint, a relative told the media.<sup>28</sup> Also on August 21, a 72-year-old from Hnan Khar Village in Magwe Region’s Gangaw Township died of internal injuries suffered when he was tortured by soldiers during a raid on his village on August 19.<sup>29</sup> Early on August 22, regime forces raided and looted villages in Sagaing Region’s Depayin Township, according to the residents.<sup>30</sup> At least 12 civilians, including a 72 year-old man and a 10 year-old boy, were killed by military forces during the week of August 23.<sup>31</sup>

A civilian detained by the junta for his alleged involvement in bomb attacks has died in military custody, according to relatives of the victim.<sup>32</sup> The August 1 issue of regime-controlled newspapers claimed that the 23-year-old victim, Htet Ko Oo, was arrested with two other people and a homemade gun and explosives at a warehouse in Yangon’s Dagon Seikkan Township on July 20.<sup>33</sup> Htet Ko Oo’s family said that he left his hometown of Pyapon in Ayeyarwady Region on May 15 along with friends to work in Yangon.<sup>34</sup> They learned of his arrest only after it was reported in newspapers.<sup>35</sup> As of August 3, 946 people, including children, have been killed by junta forces since the coup.<sup>36</sup> 5,478 people have been detained and arrest warrants issued for another 1,964 people, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.<sup>37</sup>

Two people were killed and another two injured in Yangon on August 5 in a series of attacks apparently targeting informants and officials working for the military regime.<sup>38</sup> San Win, 53, was shot three times and died at a military hospital, according to junta-controlled media.<sup>39</sup> His wife, Thi Da, survived despite being shot twice.<sup>40</sup> It remains unclear why the couple were targeted, but the regime blamed “terrorists” – the military’s euphemism for civilian resistance fighters and the People’s Defense Forces (“PDF”).<sup>41</sup> However, many opponents of the regime claim that junta forces are behind the attacks in an effort to blacken the name of the PDF.<sup>42</sup> Anti-regime protesters have pointed out that regime troops and police are using ambulances and civilian vehicles in their shootings and crackdowns on the pro-democracy movement.<sup>43</sup>

More than 40 junta soldiers were reportedly killed and many others wounded by civilian resistance fighters in Sagaing Region and Chin and Shan States on August 14 and 15.<sup>44</sup> At least 11 junta troops were killed in Shan State during a firefight with resistance fighters from across Kayah State and a Shan State township on August 14.<sup>45</sup> On August 15, junta soldiers on the Mindat-Matupi highway used explosives on a Mindat Chinland Defense Force camp about 25km west of the Chin State mountaintop town of Mindat.<sup>46</sup> A shootout followed between the military and resistance fighters.<sup>47</sup> Another military unit raided villages, including those sheltering displaced civilians from Mindat town, in the north of the township, according to residents and the people's administration.<sup>48</sup> At least 10 junta soldiers were reportedly killed by civilian resistance fighters from the Southern Shan State Generation during a raid on a regime camp in Nansang Township on August 15.<sup>49</sup>

Around 50 junta soldiers were reportedly killed and many others wounded in a series of landmine attacks by civilian resistance fighters in Magwe Region's Gangaw Township.<sup>50</sup> On August 19, a vehicle carrying junta soldiers triggered a landmine planted by the civilian resistance fighters of the People's Defense Force-Gangaw on the Gangaw-Kale Highway.<sup>51</sup> At least 20 soldiers were killed in the explosion and many others were injured, a PDF-Gangaw spokesperson said.<sup>52</sup>

Around 30 junta soldiers were reportedly killed and 15 others wounded during an ambush by the civilian resistance Yaw Defense Force ("YDF") in Gangaw Township, Magwe Region, on August 23.<sup>53</sup> Sixteen YDF fighters ambushed a military convoy on the Gangaw-Kale highway, according to the group's statement.<sup>54</sup> The group, which represents the Yaw community in Gangaw, reportedly used two grenade launchers, three landmines and homemade grenades.<sup>55</sup>

Six junta soldiers were killed and many others wounded by civilian resistance fighters in Mandalay Region's Mogoke Township on August 16.<sup>56</sup> In the morning, civilian resistance fighters of the People's Defense Force-Mogoke and troops from the ethnic armed group the Kachin Independence Army ("KIA") ambushed the troops from the military's Battalion 148 near Ho Weit Village in the east of the township.<sup>57</sup> PDF-Mogoke said in a statement that the clash occurred as the junta troops attempted to raid an area controlled by the PDF in the township.<sup>58</sup>

Some aircraft were hit by shrapnel in explosions at Magwe military airbase on August 8, according to the regime's spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun.<sup>59</sup> An alliance of resistance fighters and the Beikthano People's Defense Force claimed responsibility, saying they jointly attacked the airbase to mark the 33rd anniversary of the 1988 uprising when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets across the country to oppose military dictator General Ne Win.<sup>60</sup> Some Magwe residents claimed three fighters were damaged in the explosions but the regime did not give details.<sup>61</sup>

On August 18 and 19, around 40 military troops based in Tanintharyi and Magwe regions reportedly fled the armed forces and joined the uprising against the junta.<sup>62</sup> The defections came amid heavy daily losses being inflicted on junta forces by civilian resistance fighters and ethnic

armed organizations.<sup>63</sup> On August 19, around 25 soldiers based in Dawei Township, Tanintharyi Region, abandoned their posts with their firearms, according to the Intelligence Agency in Tanintharyi, which was formed by soldiers who have joined the civil disobedience movement.<sup>64</sup> On August 18, around 15 personnel from a military weapons factory in Thayet Township, Magwe Region, have reportedly defected with their weapons.<sup>65</sup> However, the regime has denied the defections, saying it is propaganda to boost armed resistance against the junta.<sup>66</sup> Around 2,000 soldiers and police have joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (“CDM”) since the Myanmar military’s February 1 coup, according to People’s Embrace, a group helping security forces personnel who are refusing to work for the regime.<sup>67</sup>

Striking police officers in Kayah State have formed a police force, which will work together with anti-regime groups to fight military rule.<sup>68</sup> It is the first such shadow police force to be formed in Myanmar since the junta’s February 1 coup.<sup>69</sup> The Karenni State Police was formed on August 15 under the leadership of the Karenni State Consultative Council.<sup>70</sup> The police force consists of 320 police who defected from the junta-controlled Home Affairs Ministry after the coup.<sup>71</sup> Most are from Kayah State and Pekon Township in southern Shan State, but a few are police from central Myanmar who have taken refuge in Kayah in southeastern Myanmar.<sup>72</sup>

## **II. Political Developments**

### **A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis**

The Rohingya are not yet included in the regime’s national vaccination program, according to the military authorities.<sup>73</sup> “They are not on the vaccination list for the time being. Priority is given to citizens under state policy. We will vaccinate all the citizens regardless of their religion and race. As vaccines are bought with public funds, citizens have to be given priority,” said Hla Thein, spokesman for the state’s military governing body.<sup>74</sup> Non-citizens are not on the list because people are registered for vaccination based on their citizenship IDs and the regime’s policy is to prioritize citizens, said Hla Thein, who is also the state’s advocate general.<sup>75</sup> COVID-19 cases have been reported in several Rohingya displacement camps in the Rakhine state capital, Sittwe, according to community leaders.<sup>76</sup>

Rohingya communities in villages and displacement camps in Sittwe and Buthidaung townships in Rakhine State say they have been facing food shortages for more than three months.<sup>77</sup> Displacement camps holding hundreds of thousands of Rohingya in the west of Sittwe have received no relief aid since June, Khaung Dokka camp manager Maung Tin told *The Irrawaddy*.<sup>78</sup>

Myanmar’s military regime added a genocide law to the country’s colonial-era Penal Code, a move being seen by legal experts as an attempt to ease international pressure on the regime as it faces a genocide charge at a United Nations court for its soldiers’ atrocities against the Rohingya. The new provisions threaten the death sentence for murders committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The addition to the Penal Code also carries a life sentence for other crimes committed with genocidal purpose,

including causing grievous hurt or serious mental harm to members of a group, deliberately inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures, not in accordance with any existing laws, intended to prevent births within a group and forcibly transferring children of a group to another group. The promulgation of the new genocide law coincided with an online campaign to mark the fourth anniversary of atrocities against the Rohingya in 2017. A Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day was organized online on August 25, with many activists expressing their apologies to the Rohingya for failing to speak out while they were being persecuted by the Myanmar military. One legal expert, who asked for anonymity, said that the military regime has enacted the genocide law to ease international pressure on it as it faces the genocide charge at the International Court of Justice, but the move will not give the regime any protection from crimes it has previously committed.

## **B. Corruption**

Former leaders Aung San Suu Kyi's and Min Wyint's trials have been postponed until September.<sup>79</sup> The military regime has brought a host of charges against the two former leaders, including allegations of incitement and breach of the country's anti-corruption laws. Aung San Suu Kyi faces a total of ten charges, carrying a potential sentence of 75 years.<sup>80</sup>

## **C. International Community / Sanctions**

On August 17, Rohingya refugees testified remotely in a court in Argentina, which is considering using the principle of universal jurisdiction to bring a case against Myanmar's leaders for genocide and crimes against humanity.<sup>81</sup> This testimony is the first time the Rohingya will have the opportunity to tell a court of the atrocities they have suffered.<sup>82</sup>

On August 17, Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government ("NUG") reported the massacres of civilians by the current military regime in July to the United Nations ("UN") Security Council.<sup>83</sup> According to the NUG's human rights minister, the report provides strong evidence that the military junta are guilty of war crimes saying that "[w]illful killing and torture of unarmed civilians; intentional, excessive use of force in conflict situations are all equivalent to war crimes."<sup>84</sup>

In early August, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State spoke with an exiled member of the NUG, marking the first contact between a senior U.S. official and the NUG since the coup.<sup>85</sup> The U.S. Secretary of State separately urged ASEAN nations during a meeting to "hold the junta accountable." Following the ASEAN meetings, ASEAN appointed a top Brunei diplomat as envoy to Myanmar; his appointment is expected to facilitate emergency aid to Myanmar from ASEAN.<sup>86</sup>

During a speech in Singapore, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris condemned the "violent repression" of the Myanmar military and urged Indo-Pacific nations to join the U.S. in its effort to restore democracy in Myanmar.<sup>87</sup> She also reiterated that the United States is committed to supporting the people of Myanmar in their attempts to restore democracy.<sup>88</sup>

As of August 11, the military junta had not responded to a request for proposed dialogue from the UN special envoy for Myanmar, saying, “Some of the ideas I gave him to decide the dialogue idea were heard, like to make a statement that lawsuits against health workers will be withdrawn. On the dialogue, I didn’t receive an answer: not a positive or not a negative.”<sup>89</sup>

In early August, the UN warned that up to 6.2 million people in Myanmar are at risk of being plunged into hunger by October.<sup>90</sup> The U.S. ambassador to the UN has spoken with a renowned local Myanmar physician about facilitating \$50 million in emergency humanitarian aid to the people of Myanmar to provide emergency food assistance, essential healthcare and other services.<sup>91</sup> Any funds provided would flow through non-governmental organizations.<sup>92</sup>

In early August, U.S. prosecutors charged two Myanmar citizens in a plot to attack Myanmar’s UN ambassador.<sup>93</sup> The plot, which was planned in the United States, involved hiring hitmen who would force the ambassador to resign or kill him if he refused to resign.<sup>94</sup>

### **III. Civil and Political Rights**

#### **A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association**

The military regime released a number of detained civil servants on August 2, including a few doctors who were arrested for their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement (“CDM”).<sup>95</sup> However, some 400 doctors and 180 nurses are the subject of arrest warrants for their participation in the CDM, according to the U.S.-based Physicians for Human Rights.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, between the February 1 coup and July 6, at least 157 healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses and medical students, were arrested, while 12 were killed and 32 wounded in anti-regime protests, the group said.<sup>97</sup> Many more health workers are still taking part in the CDM.<sup>98</sup> As of August 2, a total of 5,474 people, including 70 healthcare workers, remain in detention and 1,964 are in hiding evading arrest warrants, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.<sup>99</sup>

Yangon Region authorities have barred a lawyer who is part of Aung San Suu Kyi’s defense team from talking to the media, foreign diplomats and international NGOs, saying that her comments affect the stability of Myanmar.<sup>100</sup> San Mar Lar Nyunt, a Yangon-based lawyer, was taken from a relative’s home by district and township officials and police.<sup>101</sup> She was then forced to sign a document pledging that, “she would not talk to both domestic and foreign media, foreign diplomats and international non-governmental organizations,” according to another Yangon-based lawyer, who spoke on condition of anonymity.<sup>102</sup> The anonymous Yangon lawyer who revealed the gagging of San Mar Lar Nyunt said everyone has the right to free speech under the 2008 Constitution, which was drafted by a former military regime.<sup>103</sup>

Myanmar’s military regime is confiscating radios from shops and planned to restrict imports after the NUG launched a radio station.<sup>104</sup> Radio NUG, named after the shadow government formed by the ousted National League for Democracy and ethnic representatives in April, launched on August 20 and airs twice daily for 30 minutes on a 10-band radio.<sup>105</sup>

More than 30 political detainees are being interrogated by the prison authorities in Mandalay's Obo Prison following a loud protest commemorating the 1988 uprising, according to Prison Department's spokesman Chan Aye Kyaw.<sup>106</sup> Numerous political prisoners being held for their anti-regime activities, defied the regime, yelling slogans inside the cells to mark the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the popular pro-democracy uprising.<sup>107</sup>

## **B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship**

Myanmar's coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing signed an amendment to the Counterterrorism Law, introducing harsher penalties for supporting anti-regime activities.<sup>108</sup> Under the amendment, the jail term is increased from three to seven years for "acts of exhortation, persuasion, propaganda and recruitment of any person to participate in any terrorist group or activities of terrorism."<sup>109</sup> Legal analysts said the amendment is a threat to media reports in support of the NUG and the People's Defense Force because it allows the military junta to prosecute outlets under the false pretext of propaganda.<sup>110</sup> They also said the Counterterrorism Law makes it harder for the accused to prove innocence.<sup>111</sup> In other criminal cases, the prosecution is responsible to prove the defendant guilty but, under the Counterterrorism Law, the accused has to prove their innocence.<sup>112</sup>

Persecution of the press has continued throughout August in Myanmar, bringing the total number of journalists arrested since the February coup to 95.<sup>113</sup> On August 15, two journalists, Sithu Aung Myint and Htet Khine, were arrested from their hideout in Yangon.<sup>114</sup> According to the Military Regime, Sithu Aung Myint wrote articles for *Voice of America* and *Frontier Myanmar*, which were critical of the regime, and which incited government employees to join the civil disobedience movement.<sup>115</sup> Pursuant to those allegations, Sithu Aung Myint has been charged with spreading false news under Article 505(a) of the Penal Code and could face up to three years in prison. Additionally, he was also charged with attempting to "cause hatred and disaffection" under Article 124(a), which carries with it a life sentence.<sup>116</sup> Htet Khine was charged under the Unlawful Association Act for harboring Sithu Aung Myint and for allegedly working as a volunteer editor for *Federal FM*.<sup>117</sup> Prior to her detention, Htet Khine presented a program for *BBC Media Action*, the corporation's international development charity.<sup>118</sup> *BBC Media Action* issued a statement that it was concerned about Htet Khine's safety and was closely monitoring the situation.<sup>119</sup> According to *The Irrawaddy*, neither journalist has had access to a lawyer since their arrest and are likely to be moved to Insein Prison, where approximately 50 journalists are thought to be detained at this time.<sup>120</sup>

## **IV. Economic Development**

### **A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment**

Myanmar is limiting the number of foreign staff allowed to work in domestic banks, a move that industry sources warn could further impede financial development in a country that had seen a boom in foreign investment before the military coup.<sup>121</sup> A letter dated August 2 and posted on the central bank's website said major banks can now employ no more than 25 foreign



staff, 15 at a medium-sized bank and eight at small lenders. In addition, a bank must obtain authorization 30 days before hiring a foreign national and some senior posts must be held by local citizens.

The Myanmar junta is inviting bids to provide legal services to the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (“KPSEZ”) and deep-sea port project in western Rakhine State, a key strategic component of China’s Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>122</sup> Junta-controlled media announced that both local and foreign law firms had until August 10 to submit their expression of interest to provide legal services to the management committee of the KPSEZ.

On August 10, Kirin Holdings posted an impairment loss of over 21.4 billion yen (USD\$193 million) in the first six months of 2021 due to the outlook for a continuing high level of uncertainty caused by the takeover in February 2021 of its beer production business in Myanmar.<sup>123</sup> Kirin owns 51% of two beer production companies, Myanmar Brewery and Mandalay Brewery. The remainder of both companies is owned by Myanmar Economic Holdings, a conglomerate that serves as a welfare fund for Myanmar’s military. Myanmar Economic Holdings, along with senior military officers and other military-affiliated companies, has been sanctioned by the U.S. and other countries.

On August 12, a group of 45 global and Myanmar human rights, media and other organizations called on Norway’s Telenor Group to halt the controversial sale of its Myanmar operation to M1 Group, a Lebanese company with ties to Myanmar’s junta.<sup>124</sup> Telenor Group has been one of Myanmar’s largest investors since launching its operations in the country in 2014. It reported 18.2 million subscribers in its first quarter financial report for 2021. The company agreed to sell its Myanmar operation to M1 for US\$105 million. Telenor confirmed in July that as part of the deal it would transfer the call records of its more than 18 million subscribers to M1.

Australian mining company, Myanmar Metals Limited (“MYL”), has divested its entire stake in a historic mining project in Myanmar’s northeast, saying the “political situation in Myanmar has undermined confidence of markets.”<sup>125</sup> MYL has entered into binding agreements to dispose of its 51% stake in the Bawdwin project to its local partner, Win Myint Mo Industries Co. Ltd., for a total of US\$30 million.

## **B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects**

The Myanmar government investment agency approved the registration of a joint venture between a Chinese company and a government-backed committee to develop China’s strategic deep-sea port project in western Rakhine State.<sup>126</sup> The approval moves the long-delayed backbone project of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor one step closer to launch.<sup>127</sup> The entire project covers 4,300 acres (about 1,750 hectares).<sup>128</sup> The joint venture also plans to construct an industrial zone with facilities for textile and garment manufacturing, construction materials processing, food processing, pharmaceuticals, electronics, marine supplies and services and research.<sup>129</sup>

A new rail line providing China with access to the Indian Ocean via Myanmar was opened on August 25 on the Chinese side of the border.<sup>130</sup> The route is the first to link western China with the Indian Ocean, which will also significantly reduce the time needed to import cargo to landlocked Yunnan Province.<sup>131</sup> The route will cross Mandalay, Lashio and Hsenwi on the Myanmar side.<sup>132</sup> The route is expected to become the lifeblood of international trade for China and Myanmar, while providing a source of income for Myanmar's military regime.<sup>133</sup>

### **C. Land Seizure**

There have been no material updates since the previous report.

## **V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence**

### **A. Ethnic Violence**

The security situation in south-eastern Myanmar remains volatile, particularly across Kayah and Kayin States as well as southern areas of neighboring Shan State.<sup>134</sup> Sporadic clashes between the Myanmar Armed Forces (“MAF”) and the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (“KNDF”), People’s Defense Forces (“PDF”) and Karen National Liberation Army (“KNLA”) continue to be reported.<sup>135</sup> In Kayah State, hostilities between the Myanmar army and the KNDF have increased since August 3 in Bawlake, Demoso, Hpasawng, Hpruso and Loikaw townships.<sup>136</sup> In the southern areas of Shan State, clashes between the alliance of KNDF with local PDFs and the combined forces of the Myanmar army with the Pa-O National Army have also been reported in Pekon and Pinlaung townships.<sup>137</sup> In Kayin State, armed clashes, including artillery fire, have been reported between the KNLA and the alliance of the Myanmar army with the Border Guard Force in Hpapun Township since August 1.<sup>138</sup> Sporadic small-scale clashes between the MAF and the KNLA and PDFs have also been reported in Mon State, eastern Bago and Tanintharyi regions.<sup>139</sup>

As of August 23, UNHCR estimates that 141,200 people remained internally displaced across south-eastern Myanmar as a result of armed clashes and insecurity.<sup>140</sup> The figure includes 75,300 people in Kayah State, 17,700 people in southern Shan State, 47,100 people in Kayin State and 1,100 people in Mon State.<sup>141</sup> Population movement in affected areas remains fluid; initial reports indicate at least 4,000 people were newly displaced in Kayah State.<sup>142</sup> Despite intermittent fighting, some returning internally displaced persons (“IDPs”) have been observed in Kayah State and Shan State in recent weeks as the internally displaced persons did not have access to healthcare in the displacement areas and some needed to tend to farming in their areas of origin.<sup>143</sup> Many IDPs were previously sheltered by host families and living in difficult, crowded and make-shift conditions with limited resources.<sup>144</sup>

The security situation in Chin State remains volatile with renewed and intense fighting reported between the MAF and PDF in Falam, Hakha, Matupi, Mindat and Thantlang townships.<sup>145</sup> As of August 17, close to 16,700 people remained displaced in several townships in and around Chin State.<sup>146</sup> However, there have also been reports of small-scale returns among

the displaced population, with some 2,170 people having returned to Thantlang during the reporting period.<sup>147</sup>

An estimated 4,000 people have reportedly been newly displaced in four townships in the southern and northern areas of Shan State between July 27 and August 23 due to armed clashes between the MAF and ethnic armed organizations.<sup>148</sup> In Kyaukme Township in northern areas of Shan State, close to 2,000 people from eight village tracts had fled from their homes due to clashes between the Restoration Council of Shan State and the alliance of the Shan State Progress Party with the Ta'ang National Liberation Army.<sup>149</sup> A further 170 people in Man Yang Village Tract in Muse Township were displaced due to clashes between the MAF and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army.<sup>150</sup> There have also been displacements in Kyethi and Mongkaing townships in southern areas of Shan State.<sup>151</sup>

## **B. Peace Talks**

Karen National Union (“KNU”) leader General Saw Mutu Sae Poe said dialogue will be fruitless unless Myanmar’s military regime has the political will to engage.<sup>152</sup> “So long as there is no political will for dialogue to resolve the problems, it is impossible to place our hope in dialogue,” said the general.<sup>153</sup> His comments came three months after he publicly supported talks with the junta.<sup>154</sup> A senior member of the Karen National Liberation Army (“KNLA”), the armed wing of the KNU, which has been fighting the regime, said Mutu Sae Poe’s statement is out of touch.<sup>155</sup> “It appears that he has only dimly realized now that dialogue no longer works,” he said.<sup>156</sup>

Wa National Party (“WNP”) chairman Sai Pao Nup has resigned after pledging to cooperate with the military regime.<sup>157</sup> The former leader of the Wa peoples’ ethnic organization signed a joint statement along with the military’s proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (“USDP”) agreeing to work with the junta.<sup>158</sup> Sai Pao Nup signed the statement without the approval of the WNP’s central executive committee (“CEC”), so undermining public confidence in the party, said the CEC.<sup>159</sup> The WNP issued a statement distancing themselves from their chairman on August 6, saying his acts deviated from the party’s democratic norms, rules and objectives.<sup>160</sup> Sai Pao Nup resigned his position and party membership on August 10.<sup>161</sup>

1 The Irrawaddy, August 2, 2021: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/fears-of-another-long-dictatorship-as-myanmar-coup-maker-appoints-himself-pm.html>.

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