



Report Briefer

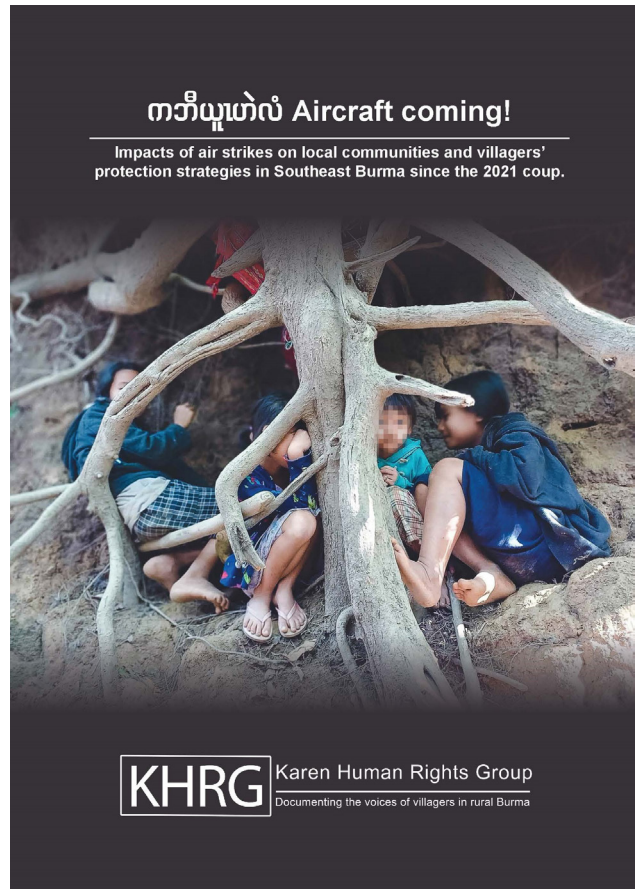
November 2024

ကဘီယူဟဲလီ (K'Baw Yoo Heh Lee!) Aircraft coming! Impacts of air strikes on local communities and villagers' protection strategies in Southeast Burma since the 2021 coup.

Since the 2021 military coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) has conducted widespread and systematic attacks on civilians throughout Burma, in attempt to consolidate power and suppress opposition. As part of this effort, the SAC has increasingly relied on the use of air strikes, including within locally-defined Karen State. Despite international calls for the SAC to cease its attacks on civilians, air attacks in Southeast Burma have increased at an alarming rate, having detrimental impacts on villagers and their communities.

The use of air strikes is consistent with the Burma Army's longstanding practice of conducting attacks on civilians to undermine resistance movements, spread terror, and force civilians under its control. Whilst previously realised through ground attacks under the 'four cuts' strategy (attacks on civilians conducted with the aim of severing ties of armed resistance groups to food, recruits, funds and intelligence), air attacks since the 2021 coup have both reinvigorated and intensified past military operations. Attacks by air, characterised by their suddenness, magnitude, and unpredictability, leave villagers with fewer means of self-protection, cause extensive destruction to communities, and create a threat that permeates all aspects of everyday life. Nowhere in Karen State is safe.

SAC air attacks are conducted indiscriminately against civilians in the context of fighting between armed resistance groups and the SAC. However, many attacks are directed at villagers in the absence of any identifiable link to the conflict and away from the presence of armed resistance fighters. The nature of these attacks on civilians vary - with some air strikes directed at particular villages or specific community buildings, while others are carried out by bombardment, impacting multiple villages over an extended period of time. When examined holistically, and consistent with the Burma Army's enduring view of villagers as being an extension of armed resistance groups, it is alleged that air strikes in Karen State are used as a form of collective punishment. These attacks amount to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity where they are conducted throughout Southeast Burma, placing an obligation on the international community to act to prevent such crimes and assist with the urgent protection needs of civilians.



The full report is available in English and Burmese, and the report briefer is available in English, Karen, and Burmese at www.khrgh.org

While the international community remains inactive, villagers and communities in Karen State continue to face the devastating consequences of SAC air strikes, including rising civilian casualties, the destruction of entire villages and communities, mass displacement, food insecurity, escalating health concerns, and ongoing psychological harm. These consequences are multiplying, as the SAC continues to act with impunity, and local actors struggle to mitigate challenges in an environment of ongoing armed conflict, and a lack of resources without international support. For the international community to act expediently to stop the SAC's attacks on civilians, and to assist with urgent protection needs, a clearer picture of the situation on the ground is required.

With that goal in mind, this report aims to shed light on the widespread and grave impacts of SAC air strikes, looking not only at the direct consequences of death, destruction and displacement, but the additional associated challenges on livelihoods, education, health and psychosocial wellbeing. It aims to highlight the way in which villagers aim to mitigate these impacts through village agency strategies, to map the available local and international support, and critically, to identify the gaps in protection. To achieve this, KHRG has gathered information from villagers who experienced SAC air strikes since the 2021 coup (and until June 2024). It is the views of these villagers that form the basis of this report and require the immediate attention of stakeholders. Their experiences are set out throughout the report, and their demands are found at the conclusion, namely for SAC air strikes to end, for communities to be able to return home and be reunited, and for the accomplishment of peace and justice in Karen State.

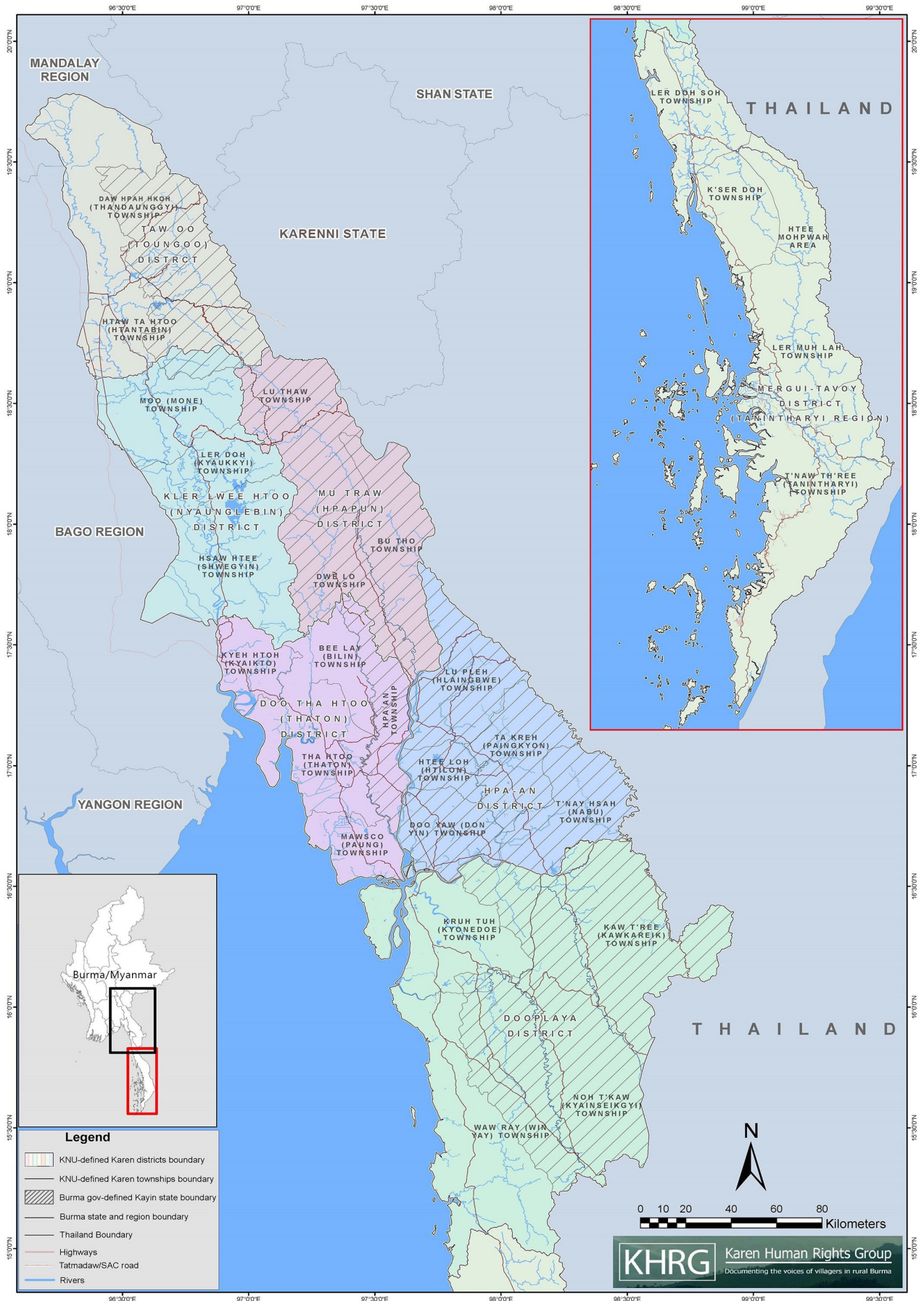
Methodology

KHRG interviewed 22 villagers (including ten women and six village leaders) from all seven districts of locally-defined Karen State in May 2024. Interviews were semi-structured and followed a preliminary questionnaire prepared for KHRG field staff on the issue of air strikes. Three additional interviews were conducted in August 2024 with local civil society and non-governmental organisations involved in the local humanitarian response. Drawing from KHRG's documentation database, KHRG also analysed 141 previous interviews with local villagers (and two interviews with two members of local ethnic armed groups) relating to air strikes, conducted from February 2021 to July 2024. This report is based on those two types of interviews as well as material documented in 66 KHRG's field reports (including incident reports, short updates, and situation updates) received from March 2021 to July 2024. The interviews and field reports cover all seven districts within KHRG's operational area: Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton), Taw Oo (Toungoo), Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin), Mergui-Tavoy, Mu Traw (Hpapun), Dooplaya and Hpa-an.

Due to insecurity in the region, all seven districts are not equally represented in the sample of interviewees and field reports. The majority of interviews were conducted in Dooplaya and Mu Traw Districts, and the majority of field reports cover Dooplaya, Mu Traw and Mergui-Tavoy Districts. The imbalance in representation is a result of varied security issues, travel difficulties, and personal risks faced by KHRG field staff when documenting human rights violations in Southeast Burma. Likewise, the actual numbers of SAC air attacks on communities are vastly undervalued in this report, due to challenges faced by community members in both reporting and documenting.

To ensure the security of interviewees and affected villagers, their personal names and locations have been replaced by single- and double-digit letter codes, where appropriate. These codes are applicable only to this report and have no link with the actual names of the villagers, or past published KHRG reports. All names and locations censored correspond to actual names and locations on file with KHRG.

Map 1: KHRG operational area (KNU-defined Kawthoolei and Burma government-defined state and region boundaries)



Key Findings

Since the 2021 coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) has conducted frequent and widespread air strikes against villagers and communities in Southeast Burma, as an extension of the 'four cuts' strategy. They have done so with total impunity. These unlawful attacks are conducted indiscriminately and directly on civilians, and as a form of collective punishment, resulting in high levels of civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. These attacks amount to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity.

SAC air strikes vary in terms of the types of weapons and methods used, however some characteristics can be identified: villages and villagers are most often the object of attack, no warnings or other precautionary measures are taken by the SAC to avoid harm to civilians, reconnaissance is frequently conducted prior to an attack, and sometimes attacks take place at night. The impacts flowing from these SAC air attacks are multi-dimensional, widespread and severe, affecting all aspects of life in Karen State.

Direct and indiscriminate attacks against villagers in Karen State have resulted in extensive loss of life and severe injuries of villagers, including a high number of casualties of children and the elderly. The magnitude, suddenness and unpredictability of air strikes prevent villagers from being able to implement effective protection strategies, leading to increased casualties. This is compounded by the lack of access to urgent and sufficient treatment due to SAC attacks on clinics and healthcare workers, and transportation challenges in armed conflict.

Air attacks have destroyed homes, schools, clinics, temples, churches, food stores and other community buildings in locally-defined Karen State. Attacks on village buildings have separated villagers and precluded access to healthcare, education and places of worship. With plantations and farmland also destroyed, and facing rising costs of inflation, villagers face severe livelihood challenges and food insecurity.

SAC air strikes have caused acute impacts on villagers' psychological wellbeing. Air strikes have instilled permanent terror into communities, affecting all aspects of villagers' life and causing villagers to remain constantly vigilant to attacks. The distressing nature of air strikes is evident through the extreme physical reactions reported by villagers including sleep deprivation, shock, crying, and panic. Grappling with the loss of life and destruction of homes, air strikes have also caused widespread anguish and collective suffering.

SAC air strikes have caused mass and protracted displacement. Families are often separated and villagers often have to flee without their belongings due to the lack of warnings. Displaced villagers face significant challenges including food insecurity, life-threatening health issues, inadequate shelter, and disruptions to education. Villagers are required to take measures to reduce their visibility and many continue to flee from one place to another, avoiding further attacks.

Villagers, local civil society, and local leaders are working tirelessly and in adverse circumstances to mitigate the impacts of SAC air strikes. They do so amidst active armed conflict, with limited resources, blocks on aid and attacks by the SAC, and a void of international support. As such, significant protection gaps remain, including access to healthcare, food security, education and specific gendered needs. Children, pregnant women, and the elderly face particular challenges.

There is a lack of international action concerning the SAC's use of air strikes against civilians. Villagers demand an urgent response to stop such attacks and to provide them with the necessary protection and support. They want to return to their villages, live in peace, and be free from oppression by the Burma Army.

Overview of chapters

Chapter 1. Background and context of the conflict in Southeast Burma

Since Burma's independence in 1948, generations of villagers in Southeast Burma have endured violence, oppression and human rights abuses at the hands of the Burma Army. In response, the Karen National Union (KNU) and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), have fought against this, demanded political autonomy, sought to protect villagers, and provided essential services through their health, education and justice departments. The ongoing conflict in locally-defined Karen State has lasted for over 70 years, with detrimental impacts on villagers.

- In the 1960s, the Burma Army implemented the 'four cuts' strategy: a scorched-earth tactic used to cut off armed resistance forces from their communities, and severing access to food, money, intelligence and recruits.
- While officially targeting members of opposition groups, the reality was a protracted campaign against civilians, leading to widespread and systematic attacks, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate shelling, burning of villages, forced relocation, destruction of food and medical supplies, and forced displacement.
- Since the 2021 coup, the SAC has increasingly relied on air warfare alongside ground offensives to target local communities and ethnic resistance forces. As a result of these widespread attacks, civilians have been killed or injured in high numbers, and whole communities have been destroyed.

"[T]he Burma military appears to be intentionally targeting civilians, by repeatedly launching air attacks on villages, IDP camps, schools, hospitals, clinics, churches and monasteries. In many cases, air strikes on villages have followed attacks on SAC units by opposition armed groups, which suggest that they are used as a form of collective violence." - Thomas H. Andrews, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (October 2023)

Chapter 2. Air strikes impacting villagers in Karen State

Air attacks on civilians in Southeast Burma have caused mass casualties (including children and elderly), mass displacement and extensive damage to entire villages including to homes, schools, temples and clinics. Beyond the physical destruction, SAC air strikes have caused detrimental impacts on mental and psychosocial wellbeing, including instilling a pervasive sense of fear and vigilance, prevented villagers from being able to secure their livelihoods, affected children's ability to go to school, separated families, hindered villagers' ability to seek adequate healthcare, and disrupted community life.

Since the 2021 coup, community members in locally-defined Karen State have reported 227 incidents of SAC air strikes causing civilian casualties or damage. 41% of all air strikes were conducted from January to June 2024 alone. Almost all documented attacks were conducted on civilian areas (including on villages, community workplaces, plantations and farms). The use of air strikes was widespread, with 11 incidents occurring in Doo Tha Htoo District, 13 in Taw Oo District, 89 in Kler Lwee Htoo, 23 in Mergui-Tavoy, 55 in Mu Traw District, 34 in Dooplaya, and two in Hpa-an District. Consistently, there was a lack of effective advanced warnings or other precautionary measures taken by the SAC to avoid or minimise civilian losses. Villagers believe that attacks on civilians in Karen State are intentional as civilians are perceived to be opponents of the regime; an extension of the 'four cuts' strategy.

"They attacked the village; the community directly. [...] As they are armed actors, they are supposed to attack their armed enemy. It is not appropriate when they attack civilians instead." – Naw C---, a villager from Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township Mu Traw District.

Chapter 2.1: Death and injury caused by air attacks in Southeast Burma

- During the reporting period (February 2021 to June 2024), KHRG documented at least 417 civilian casualties from SAC air strikes in Karen State: 168 villagers were killed and 249 were injured. Those killed or injured were most often participating in everyday activities, such as feeding their livestock, farming, sleeping, constructing community buildings or gathering at home with family and friends. Of those killed or injured, at least 67 were children and 29 were elderly. Only 22 non-civilians were reported as being injured or killed from documented air strikes during the same period.

- Significant evidence points to the SAC repeatedly directing air strikes at civilians or civilian property in the absence of any identifiable link to the conflict, supporting villagers' views that they are being intentionally targeted. In some cases, villagers described air strikes being used as a form of collective punishment.
- In some instances, villagers reported the use of air reconnaissance prior to attacks and aircraft flying low to the ground when striking, even in the absence of any military activity or fighters in the area. In other cases, villagers described evidence of inaccurate methods such as unguided air delivery or dropping bombs from high up onto villages.
- Consistent across air strikes documented during the reporting period was the failure by the SAC to give effective warnings or take other precautionary measures to minimise civilian casualties.
- Due to the Burma Army conducting air strikes onto villages - including on houses or community buildings like schools, school dormitories, churches and monasteries - groups of villagers, particularly families or students, were often killed or injured together.
- Reportedly, at least 52 air attacks on civilian areas occurred during the night-time (after dark), mostly while villagers were preparing dinner, gathered with friends and family, or sleeping in their homes or in displacement sites. Attacks after dark pose higher risks to the lives of villagers, as villagers are less alert and find it harder to flee.
- In many cases, villagers injured from air strikes subsequently died as they were not able to access medical treatment in time, particularly when air strikes were conducted at night.
- In addition to isolated attacks on villages, data collected indicates numerous instances where the SAC conducted air strikes intensively over several days or months on the same area. Sometimes aerial bombardment is conducted in tandem with ground attacks such as shelling. Villages located near SAC army camps are also at risk of aerial bombardment and shelling when the SAC transports rations.
- The high levels of civilian casualties and damage that occurred in cases where armed conflict was ongoing or had occurred recently in the vicinity or where there was presence of armed resistance soldiers in the village or incident area suggests that the SAC fails to distinguish between armed resistance fighters and villagers, and points to the disproportionality of attacks.
- In at least seven cases, prohibited weapons were used, including one incendiary shell, four cluster bombs and two munitions with effects compatible with chemical weapons.



This photo was taken in January 2023 in Zh--- village, Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. On January 12th 2023, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike on Zh--- village. The fighter jets dropped eight bombs, and six of them fell onto Zh--- village. The other two bombs fell beside the village. Five villagers, including a 3-year-old infant, were killed, and two villagers were injured. This photo shows four villagers, including the 3-year-old baby, who were killed by the air strike.

[Photo: KHRG]

Chapter 2.2. Destruction of civilian property and community

- Villagers reported extensive damage to civilian property in at least 184 SAC air attacks. Out of those, at least 67 religious buildings, 42 schools and 14 medical facilities were damaged or destroyed. It is likely that all figures are significantly undervalued due to difficulties faced by villagers in reporting exact damage and destruction while fleeing.
- In Karen State, most community buildings and homes are identifiable from the air. Houses are usually concentrated in a particular area, and community buildings such as schools and religious buildings are of larger size, with coloured roofs, and have identifiable features such as playground areas, pagodas or crosses. In many cases, reconnaissance was used by the SAC prior to attacks on villages, and villagers sometimes described aircraft as flying low to the ground when conducting their attacks.

- Villages are now considered unsafe spaces for villagers, and in the belief that these attacks are conducted by the SAC to oppress, terrorise and displace them, villagers remain afraid to live or gather in structures visible from the sky.
- The damage and destruction of homes in Southeast Burma due to SAC air strikes has devastating impacts on local communities, as families are displaced and villagers face the material loss of their shelter and belongings, which are often built and accumulated over a lifetime.
- Direct and indiscriminate attacks disrupt essential social structures, leaving families without shelter, villagers without access to crucial healthcare and education, and religious communities without their places of worship.
- In areas with active armed conflict, villagers reported increased levels of air strikes causing extensive damage and destruction, affecting homes and community buildings, as well as preventing villagers' access to their plantations and causing displacement.
- In some instances, villagers reported that the SAC bombed their village areas, destroyed their houses and caused displacement, to later steal property, or occupy villages and set up temporary army camps there.



This photo was taken in April 2023 in We--- village, Noh Poe village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. It shows a Karen Baptist church in We--- village, destroyed by a bomb from an SAC air strike on April 11th 2023. The air strike also destroyed a school and villagers' houses. [Photo: KHRG]

- Air strikes have disrupted family and community life, as villagers face the death and injuries of loved ones, the destruction of shared spaces, and the separation of family and community members. SAC air strikes have also impacted community development including women empowerment programs, education, culture, healthcare services, transportation and shared livelihood practices. The sudden impact of air strikes causing villagers to flee urgently and often separately also impacts villagers' ability to hold proper burial ceremonies for their loved ones and community members.
- Villagers face significant challenges to their livelihoods where air strikes are conducted on fields, plantations and pastures, leave unexploded ordnance, or destroy essential items such as tractors, motorbikes or farming equipment.
- Due to the risks posed by SAC air strikes on plantations, many villagers reported difficulties carrying out agricultural work, with some villagers reporting having to stop work entirely. A few villagers reported having to work despite the risks of air strikes, to avoid starvation.
- Villagers reported that air strikes preclude the ability to travel and trade freely, preventing villagers from being able buy and sell produce. Multiple villagers reported increasing inflation and costs of goods, leading to food insecurity.

Chapter 2.3. Impacts of air strikes on mental and psychosocial wellbeing

- Air strikes in Karen State since the 2021 coup have caused severe and enduring impacts on villagers' mental and psychosocial wellbeing. The pervasive threat of air strikes, their sudden and deadly force, and the scale of destruction left behind leaves communities grappling with multiple distressing emotions including terror, constant vigilance, grief, hopelessness, and anger.

"I feel like there are no words to effectively explain the fear that I had during that incident, and even now, I am still unconsciously triggered when I hear the sound of an airplane" – Naw Cn---, a Karen human rights defender who experienced an air strike in Mu Traw District.

- The SAC's use of air strikes – in particular, its use as a new and aggravated form of warfare - was reported by villagers as increasing fear among communities. Villagers often reported intense physical reactions due to extreme fears of air strikes, like shaking and vomiting blood. Villagers also described the proliferation of panic and anxiety.
- The depth of terror relating to air strikes is also evidenced in the high level of reports of villagers being triggered by the sight or sound of aircraft, including commercial airplanes.
- Constant vigilance was reported by a vast number of villagers in relation to the necessity to hide and/or limit movements to avoid being visible to SAC aircraft. These measures support villagers' views that they are being targeted and has profound impacts on overall wellbeing by restricting freedom of movement and autonomy. Consequently, some villagers reported sleep deprivation. Villagers also reported remaining close-to or in-and-out of bunkers, depending on the risk of air strike.
- A vast array of emotions were reported by villagers across Karen State in the wake of air strikes, including sadness, grief and hopelessness. These feelings were often expressed in a collective manner, with villagers describing their concerns for others, and were most often linked to the devastation caused by air strikes including death, the destruction of community property, the separation of families, and the virtual impossibility to protect one another from air attacks. The injustice of SAC air strikes was often expressed alongside feelings of grief, particularly in relation to the death of innocent villagers and the destruction of communities.

Chapter 2.4. Displacement due to air strikes

- Villagers consistently reported the predominant reason for their displacement was to seek safety from air strikes, as well as ongoing risks of air strikes in displacement sites alongside additional challenges.
- Overnight displacement allows villagers to have access to their plantations and other livelihood means, but villagers displaced routinely overnight face particular challenges including the continued risk of injury or death by an air strike when returning to the village or farmland during the day or the risk of being apprehended and arrested or killed by SAC ground forces.



This photo was taken in April 2021 in a cave in Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District, where villagers from Day Bu Noh area, Pay Kay village tract, were seeking refuge after the SAC bombarded on March 27th 2021. The picture shows an elder woman, who was over 100 years old at the time of displacement, sheltering in a cave. [Photo: KHRG]

- When air strikes are conducted for consecutive days or when other military activity is ongoing, villagers often remain in displacement sites for extended periods. Challenges associated with short-term displacement include increased uncertainty and continued risk of air strikes, as well as poor shelter and food insecurity.
- Some villagers are displaced long-term for reasons including ongoing or frequent air strikes and other military activities; the occupation or presence of SAC soldiers or remaining UXOs in their village; a persistent and uncertain risk of air strikes; or the destruction of homes and livelihood means. The large number of people facing long-term displacement demonstrates the extended impacts of air strikes on villagers' freedom and security.
- With great uncertainty and fear of being targeted in displacement sites, villagers frequently described having to move from place to place.

- Due to the fact that nowhere in Southeast Burma is safe from air strikes, fleeing to refugee camps in Thailand or sending children to schools for migrants on the Thai side of the border, such as in Ty-- Town and Tz--- refugee camp, in Tak and Mae Hong Son provinces, is sometimes considered the only option – both in short-term and long-term circumstances. However, villagers reported challenges of discrimination and pushbacks in Thailand.
- During displacement, villagers reported significant challenges associated with the lack of adequate shelter and essential supplies, increased risk of health issues, having to maintain constant vigilance including reducing their visibility and movements, difficulties securing their livelihoods, food and economic insecurity, challenges with education, and a disruption of community life.
- In some areas, tarpaulins, bamboo and other basic materials were often insufficient or did not provide adequate protection in the rainy season. While displaced, many villagers reported experiencing or witnessing others having symptoms such as coughing, skin infections, sneezing, diarrhea, and fever. Malaria in displacement sites was commonly reported in different districts. Health issues during displacement are exacerbated by the lack of availability of food, medicine and healthcare facilities, including basic medical supplies such as paracetamol. Several women had to give birth in the forest while displaced due to air strikes.
- During displacement, children and students face many challenges relating to their ability to access education. Challenges include general insecurity, attacks on schools, lack of materials, fear and other emotional impacts, difficulties studying in displacement sites, and family separation.

Chapter 3. Support available, protection gaps, and villagers' needs

Different, yet limited avenues of support are available to villagers facing air strikes in locally-defined Karen State. Villagers and the community support each other by using agency strategies; civil society and local non-governmental organisations have been delivering a coordinated humanitarian aid response; and local leaders and authorities play a role in offering protection, advice, precautionary warnings, and transportation to villagers. International support in rural Southeast Burma is limited.

Chapter 3.1. Support available amid air attacks

- Community-based efforts include sharing resources such as food, shelter, and medical supplies, as well as transporting injured villagers and setting up temporary education facilities in displacement sites. Villagers share information and try to warn each other when they believe an air strike might happen, so that they can flee the area in advance.
- Civil society and community-based organisations (CSOs/CBOs), NGOs, and ethnic service providers take all possible measures to deliver resources for villagers affected by air strikes. Support includes financial aid, food, and healthcare support in the form of medical supplies and setting up mobile clinics.
- The KNU coordinates with local authorities, such as village tract administrators and village leaders, to provide guidance and logistical support to villagers and displaced populations, including resource management and travel advice. KNU members inform local leaders and villagers about the possibility of SAC air attacks.



This photo was taken in December 2021. It shows displaced villagers from T1--- village, in Tm--- IDP site, Palu village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District, near the Thai-Burma border. Approximately 1,000 villagers from Palu village tract, including Lay Kay Kaw area, fled after the SAC conducted ground and air attacks in the area on December 15th 2021, following fighting between combined SAC and BGF troops against KNLA troops in Lay Kay Kaw area. [Photo: KHRG]

- International support in ethnic and rural areas in Southeast Burma remains limited and inconsistent. The larger INGOs, including UN agencies, have signed official agreements with the SAC authorities and mainly operate in SAC-controlled cities, leaving the vast majority of Karen villagers unprotected. Some INGOs have attempted to mitigate this by funding and cooperating with the local civil society organisations to reach rural areas.

Chapter 3.2. Other protection gaps and villager's needs

- Villagers encounter significant difficulties accessing essential resources, including basic items such as beds, blankets, shelter materials, food staples, hygiene products and medical supplies.
- The conflict and air strikes in Karen State have had gendered impacts on women and men, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and gender roles, and creating new challenges. For instance, women are usually the primary caregivers to children and the elderly, but often find themselves additionally becoming the primary breadwinners when widowed, lose support networks or become single mothers.

“We have our property, we have a pig, so, when we all moved, we left the men. They can run. Us, we have kids, we [the women] moved first.” – Naw Ct---, a women’s group leader at her church in Noh T’Kaw village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Doo Thoo District.

- Elderly individuals, pregnant women and persons with physical disabilities in Karen State face particular challenges due to active conflict and the ongoing air strikes. Their limited mobility and health issues make evacuation and access to safe zones particularly challenging. The destruction of healthcare facilities and disruption of medical services also preclude their access to necessary medical assistance, exacerbating their vulnerabilities. In displacement sites, their specific needs are often not met, leading to heightened isolation and neglect.
- In addition to air strikes, villagers face a myriad of human rights violations amid the armed conflict, including forced recruitment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, landmine and UXO contamination.

Chapter 4. Villagers’ views and demands

- Villagers interviewed for this report believe that air strikes conducted by the SAC on civilian areas are wrong and unlawful, and ask to be distinguished from military objectives in the conflict and for their villages and community buildings not to be the object of attacks.
- Villagers called on the international community, including the organisation of the United Nations, to put an end to the military dictatorship. They call for foreign governments not to cooperate with the military junta, including refraining from providing military support and assistance.
- Villagers do not want to be displaced or to become refugees. They do not want to depend on external support, but they consistently acknowledged the urgent need for more protection from international stakeholders.
- Villagers expressed that due to barriers in reporting human rights abuses, relevant organisations and stakeholders must share the experiences of villagers in Karen State, help advocate for their rights, and work to prevent further abuses from occurring.
- Villagers are deeply concerned about the conflict and the lack of accountability for unlawful attacks. Some villagers are aware that such attacks are prohibited, and call on international stakeholders to take action to hold the military junta accountable for its crimes.
- Villagers hope for the end to the military dictatorship, the withdrawal of SAC troops from their areas, and the cessation of air strikes. They want to return to their villages, reunite with their families, resume their livelihood activities, and live in peace and with freedom.

“Is there anyone who can confront the Burmese government about their actions? Is there no one left? Or are foreign leaders no longer willing to help? Will international leaders continue to watch what is happening in Myanmar like this? Can they no longer assist with what’s happening in Myanmar? Are they thinking that the conflict is in Myanmar and does not concern them? Even if they think that way, we still want them to lend a helping hand”. – Naw Bi---, a villager from Khaw Hpoh Pleh village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Thoo District

Conclusion

- Evidence gathered for this report shows that air strikes conducted by the SAC across Southeast Burma are consistently directed at villagers, their buildings and community infrastructure. SAC air strikes are conducted in multiple and irregular ways: some being carried out using a limited number of bombs directly onto villagers and their community buildings, while others are conducted by bombardment, using multiple munitions over an extensive area, including over multiple villages and plantations. Consistent across Karen State is the scale and frequency of attacks, as well as the absence of warnings or other precautionary measures taken.

SAC air strikes have killed villagers in high numbers, including children and the elderly, caused life changing and distressing injuries, and forced villagers to flee en masse.

- The urgent and sudden nature of attacks by air limits the availability of protection strategies, prevents villagers from being able to flee with adequate supplies or conduct proper burials for loved ones, causes families and communities to be separated, and instills a pervasive sense of terror and vigilance.
- Those who are injured face difficulties finding urgent medical treatment with clinics attacked, and healthcare workers operating under immensely challenging conditions, without adequate medical supplies. The destruction of homes, schools, and religious buildings has also disrupted community life and left villagers and children without access to their homes, education or places of worship and gathering.
- Attacks on villagers and their communities force them to take urgent measures for their safety, including fleeing and living for prolonged periods in hiding. While displaced, often hiding in poor shelters in the jungle and caves, villagers face escalating health concerns, including outbreaks of malaria, water-borne diseases, and women giving birth without medical support. Displaced villagers also remain at risk of attacks, taking measures to avoid being targeted.
- Despite these conditions, villagers and local civil society and community-based organisations have demonstrated immense resilience, sharing limited resources and taking measures to ensure one another's safety. However, they continue to do so in an environment of insecurity, a lack of sufficient support, and a void of international attention.

Legal implications of the findings

- Direct attacks on civilians or civilian objects are prohibited, amount to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity. Indiscriminate attacks (including bombardment), disproportionate attacks, and collective punishments are also prohibited.
- There have also been grave violations committed by the SAC against children, including killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of access to humanitarian aid.
- This report has set out the additional grave and reverberating impacts on communities in Southeast Burma violating rights protected under international human rights law, including, but not limited to: the right to life, liberty and security; the right to a standard of living for the health and wellbeing of oneself and one's family including food, housing, medical care and necessary social services; the right to education; the right to freedom of movement; and the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community.

Policy implications of the findings

- The international community must take urgent and concrete steps to stop the violence and civilians from armed attacks. This includes the necessary measure of immediately suspending the direct and indirect supply, sale, and transfer of aviation fuel to Burma. A comprehensive arms embargo on the country is also needed.
- With attacks ongoing, international stakeholders must take steps to protect civilians from the impacts of air strikes, including providing comprehensive humanitarian assistance. Voices of villagers must be recognised and engaged with, to ensure informed humanitarian responses are implemented. Stakeholders must be aware of local systems of aid and support already in place, and fund them so that assistance can be effectively integrated and reach all remote areas and informal displacement sites.

- Villagers have made clear that these attacks constitute an extension of historic attacks on civilians, systemic violence and forced displacement perpetrated by the Burma Army for decades. Action must be taken to end the impunity of Burma Army leaders and hold them accountable for their crimes.
- Investigative mechanisms and experts must continue to work with local human rights organisations to ensure that ongoing evidence of attacks on civilians in Southeast Burma are documented, including conducting further research into weapons and munition used by the SAC.

Recommendations

To international stakeholders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and regional and foreign governments:

- Impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Burma/Myanmar and implement extensive sanctions on the supply of arms and military material to the Myanmar military including aviation fuel, aircraft, aircraft parts, maintenance supplies, munitions, technologies, training or other technical assistance or services.
- Implement further coordinated and targeted sanctions on oil and gas revenues, as well as sanctions against junta officials to undermine their ability to finance their attacks on civilians.
- Increase support to local civil society (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and ethnic service providers who are currently assisting villagers to recover from, and cope with, the severe impacts of State Administration Council (SAC) air strikes. Assist with the development of comprehensive support mechanisms, including psychological support, for affected communities.
- Engage with neighbouring countries to ensure the effective passage of aid into Burma, in particular via land borders and through cross-border aid organisations and local civil society organisations already operating in the area.
- Acknowledge that the military junta is the root cause of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis, and the perpetrator of widespread, indiscriminate and direct attacks against civilians, as well as the driver of mass displacement in Burma. Acknowledge that the SAC is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- Refrain from conferring any legitimacy onto the SAC, including by signing agreements with it and presenting it with credentials. Similarly, refrain from engaging in any form of cooperation with the SAC, including military and economic cooperation that helps them to perpetuate human rights violations and unlawful attacks on civilians.
- Support international investigations to hold the SAC accountable for its crimes against civilians in Burma, including by prosecuting SAC leaders in international courts such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), and through universal jurisdiction proceedings.
- Broaden the scope of international investigations to include the systemic violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in locally-defined Karen State, particularly the malevolent use of air strikes to inflict terror and suffering against villagers.
- Listen to and support local and civil society organisations in their efforts to document human rights abuses in Southeast Burma and advocate for victims' rights.
- Support authorities and organisations operating in the formal refugee camps in Thailand, given the increase of villagers permanently displaced due to SAC air strikes, to ensure the betterment of the wellbeing, livelihood opportunities, and liberty of populations seeking refuge in Thailand.

