



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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“Why would they target us?”: Exploring patterns of the Burma Army's retaliatory abuses against villagers across Southeast Burma

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) is pleased to announce the release of its latest commentary report, titled: *“Why would they target us?” Exploring patterns of the Burma Army's retaliatory abuses against villagers across Southeast Burma.*

Since the 2021 military coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) has carried out violent assaults in rural villages throughout Southeast Burma/Myanmar, targeting civilians instead of armed groups. These deliberate attacks, including killings, air strikes, indiscriminate shelling, shootings, arbitrary arrests, and property destruction, have devastating consequences for local communities. Drawing from interviews with local villagers and numerous field reports, this report presents several distinct patterns of retaliatory abuses against civilians by the Burma Army in the region. It sheds light on the SAC's practice of scapegoating and collectively punishing civilians in ethnic areas, and provides a deeper understanding of the illegal and inhumane actions committed by the SAC in the country.

This report places a particular focus on villagers' perspectives and their own understanding of the human rights violations they face. It highlights how local civilian efforts and initiatives are essential in resisting, evading, and protecting villagers from SAC abuses, as well as the concrete protection measures and actions villagers demand from the international community.

The report aims to inform national, regional, and international policies, and challenge simplistic understandings of the situation in Karen State as a two-party conflict between the SAC military and ethnic armed organisations, with civilians collaterally impacted. The report highlights the urgent need for decisive action against the SAC's systematic targeting of civilians, ensuring accountability for perpetrators and supporting villagers' agency. Such measures are essential if meaningful peace and justice in Southeast Burma is to be accomplished.

KHRG calls on the international community, NGOs, and regional and foreign governments to:

- Acknowledge that the military junta is the root cause of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis, and refrain from giving any legitimacy to the junta, including by signing agreements with it and presenting credentials to it.
- Call on ASEAN to suspend Burma's ASEAN membership until a democratically-elected civilian government is restored; abandon the current Five-Point Consensus and develop a new plan that addresses the critiques outlined by numerous stakeholders; and cooperate with international and local actors to end the junta's violence against the people of Burma.

- Broaden the scope of accountability in future proceedings to include SAC crimes committed against Karen peoples, not yet covered by current investigations, as well as to investigate the war crime of *collective punishment* and the crime against humanity of *persecution*.
- Increase financial support for and collaboration with local human rights organisations and actors operating on the ground to ensure that the widest representation of voices and experiences of oppressed peoples in Burma are considered.
- Acknowledging the SAC practice of purposely targeting civilians in Southeast Burma, ensure increased and adequate humanitarian assistance and protection, including support for victims of air strikes, displacement, property destruction, torture, arbitrary arrest, and other abuses.
- Suspend all arms transfers to Burma including all weapons, munitions, surveillance technologies, and other military and security equipment. Suspend exports of aviation fuel, and take action to avoid contributing to these supply chains, whether directly or indirectly.

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