



Statement on 2024 World Humanitarian Day: Addressing the humanitarian crisis in Southeast Burma, three years after the coup

August 19th 2024

On this *World Humanitarian Day*, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) draws international attention to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Southeast Burma, fuelled by the Myanmar military junta's relentless violence, and strongly condemns the obstruction and weaponisation of humanitarian aid and emergency assistance to the growing number of people in need. KHRG calls on the international community to jointly take concrete action to end military junta's violence, to support the delivery of aid through local channels, and to ensure the safety of aid workers.

Since the military coup in 2021, the escalation of the armed conflict and military activity by the Burma Army, including through air and ground attacks against civilians, arbitrary arrests and detention, and other gross human rights violations, has exacerbated the security risks and threats to the livelihoods of local communities, increasing the already ongoing displacement of civilians. The partial commitment of neighbouring governments to respect international standards on the right to seek protection across international borders has created a situation where internal displacement is the only option for most villagers.¹

Humanitarian actors working within national borders face serious protection challenges, largely due to restrictions on movement and transport of goods by the State Administration Council (SAC). These restrictions often include confiscation and destruction of medical and food supplies, and direct threats against aid workers, including arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances.² For instance, in Tha Htoo (Thaton) Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, a villager reported that SAC troops at checkpoints did not allow them to transport rice, health and medical supplies, and electrical materials such as batteries, wires and motor oil. He added that they have to be questioned by SAC soldiers whenever they transport any goods, including food. After being questioned by the SAC, their supplies are often confiscated and/or destroyed, and they have also had to pay fines to the SAC soldiers.³ Similarly, a member of the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) in Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District explained: "*Yes, we are facing food insecurity. It is not easy to make money at the moment. Some villagers don't have enough rice. We cannot buy things because we cannot travel. It is becoming a challenge for us*

¹ KHRG, [Denied and Deprived. Local communities confronting the humanitarian crisis and protection challenges in Southeast Burma](#), Thematic Report, June 2022, pp.12-14. See, Fortify Rights, [Thailand: Prevent Force Returns of Myanmar Refugees, Provide Legal Status](#), News Release, 17 May 2024; Human Rights Watch, [Thailand: Recent Refugees Pushed Back to Myanmar. Pushbacks Endanger People Fleeing Airstrikes in Karenni State](#), News Release, 29 November 2023.

² KHRG, *Denied and Deprived*, above, pp.16-17; UN OCHA Myanmar, [Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 39](#), 1 July 2024, p.2.

³ KHRG, [Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Forced portering and the use of civilians as human shields, and updates on livelihood, health and education, August to September 2021](#)", February 2022.

to feed our families".⁴ Recognising the wider reverberations of the SAC's restrictive measures and their effects on all villagers, whether they are currently facing displacement or not, is key to understanding the full extent of the humanitarian crisis in Southeast Burma and the need for an immediate solution.

International humanitarian law, which is designed to protect civilians in armed conflict, continues to be violated by the Burma Army. Each violation has serious and long-lasting consequences, deepening divisions and making any hope of a peaceful resolution to the conflict increasingly unlikely. These restrictions on the movement of goods not only affect the delivery of humanitarian assistance to displaced villagers, but also their livelihoods and healthcare. In areas that are typically dependent on access to supplies from the city, any blockage of goods also serves as a means of cutting off villagers from necessities. This violates international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which the Myanmar government ratified in 2017, and the Geneva Convention (Article 3), which also provides protection against situations where human dignity is threatened by lack of essential supplies.⁵

On this *World Humanitarian Day*, KHRG also celebrates the strength of local actors in addressing this situation and their efforts in reaching rural and displaced communities in Karen State. Amidst this human rights and humanitarian crisis caused by the SAC, local civil society and community-based organisations (CSO/CBOs), ethnic service providers and faith-based organisations, all with knowledge and long experience of the local context, have been the main actors providing humanitarian assistance and emergency relief to villagers.

Today, KHRG also makes an urgent appeal to international stakeholders to take further decisive action to end the junta's atrocity crimes, as well as increase foreign support to protect communities throughout the country, including in Southeast Burma. We call on all relevant stakeholders to:

- Acknowledge that the SAC is the root cause of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis, including the mass displacement of civilians.
- Refrain from giving any legitimacy to the military junta, and to ensure that the SAC is unable to hold decision-making power over the distribution of aid.
- Reaffirm their commitment to the people of Burma by escalating their financial support to local CSOs/CBOs and ethnic service providers, particularly on access to healthcare, education, legal assistance, and humanitarian aid.
- Include the civil society in decision-making, and prioritise and strengthen methods of service delivery and communication that rely on local CSO/CBOs and ethnic service providers.

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⁴ KHRG, *Denied and Deprived*, above, p. 20.

⁵ *Denied and Deprived*, p.17.