

# *Women Rooting Out Dictators in Myanmar*

**Women's News Quarterly Analysis Report from February to April 2022**



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## Introuduction

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In order to root out military dictatorship since the attempted coup by the military council in February 2021, until today women's activities against dictatorship have not declined. Peaceful demonstrations are used against the dictatorship, and women also join defense forces. Other activities include housewives joining demonstration against the military junta by participating in silence strikes and "no playing water in Thingyan" campaign. Some of those who joined those silence strikes were arbitrarily arrested, tortured, taken hostage and killed by the military. Additionally, military continuously committed sexual violences including raping and killing women.

Members of military council committed inhumane acts such as sexual violence in the villages they have entered and burned down public properties and homes. The number of people who have been forced to leave their homes are increasing due to conflict between military and people defense forces. Numbers of Internally Displaced People's (IDPs) are increasing and they are facing a lack of food supplies and scarcity of water.

Women become more vulnerable due to the rise of the price of commodities and lack of employment opportunities. Although the military junta are trying to suppress dissent, it could be analyze that their actions were not successful. Moreover, the main mechanisms of a country such as health, education, judicial services and the rule of law have completely collapsed.

# Women's situation after the attempted coup

## ▪ *Women's political activities*

Although the military junta continuously arrest and kill those who demonstrate against them, women have not been silenced during these last three months. On the International Women's Day, March 8th, women bravely write their own herstory. They lead demonstrations with slogans such as “Women on the front to root out violences”. During the Thingyan (Water festival), women avoided playing with water and demonstrated against the military with the slogan “Spring women who do not dance”.

Those women who participated in demonstration against military juntas founded Rose Women's Union with fifteen executive members and more than 400 members on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2022.<sup>1</sup> It is known that this Rose Women's Union aims to root out dictators, to promote women's roles and gender equality, to abolish violence against women and children.



Photo 1: Women's March. Photo from Women Alliance Burma

<sup>1</sup> RFA, 9<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=1126033028198593>

Women groups (?) oppose against military juntas through non-violence activities like peaceful demonstrations, and the number of women who joined local defense forces to oppose the military are increasing. Although women who joined local defense forces faced many difficulties, a woman from Burma People Liberation Army (BPLA) became a training instructor.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a woman called Spring Daywi who was a former parliament member of Mying Township also actively participate in rooting out military juntas as second-commander. This challenged the stereotypes or the social perceptions on women as weak and show that the capacity and leadership of women.

Observing these actions of women joining the local defense forces, it could be analyzed that women's political participation is still strong in fighting against military group through leadership roles. They also take the roles of medical assistants and other appointed duties.

Women who demonstrate or fight against military are subjected to arbitrary arrests, prison sentences and murders. From February 2021 to April 2022, there 2055 number of women who got arrested by military group and among them 153 number of women were sentenced. There are 8 women who sentenced to death penalty and 6 women sentenced to life imprisonment. Total 171 women were dead.

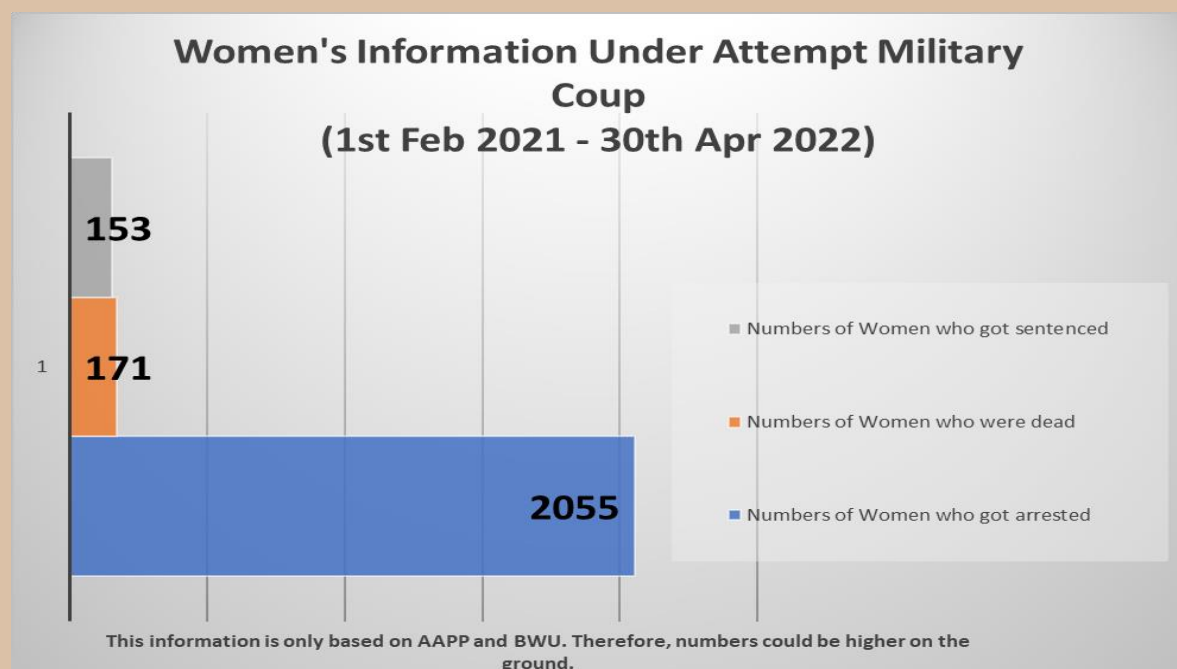


Photo 3: The graph shows numbers of women arrested, sentenced and dead.

<sup>2</sup> DVB, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <http://burmese.dvb.no/archives/529760?fbclid=IwAR1OGUkh7mRh7PngJOMToNmBiFrZ1BpF0-3A6UhOcf74-GkMsPZ8ZXqaOBY>



## ▪ *Violence Against Women*

Members of the military continuously commit physical and mental violence against women. On April 20th, military group cracked down a peaceful demonstration in South Oakalarpa, Yangon by accelerating police car, 3 women were arrested.<sup>3</sup> This kind of crack down on protesters happened several times in Myanmar during the attempt military coup. This shows that military group is committing violence toward citizens who were peacefully protested against them. However, those who commit these crimes were not punished therefore, it could be analyzed that judicial system in Myanmar has completely collapsed.

Military group arrest and sued women without reasons and subjected women by arresting them as hostages and killing them. A 7 months pregnant woman called Thu Zar Win from Hlaning Wa village, Kawkarate township, Karen state was arrested and sued because she suspected of supporting People Defense Forces.<sup>4</sup> Although MANY? Pregnant women were arrested, the military does not provide these women with enough nutritious food and health care when in detention or in prison.



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Photo 4: Photo from Khit Thit Media

<sup>3</sup> RFA, 20<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/10161777630503128>

<sup>4</sup> Khit Thit Media, 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1433230280447647>

A executive member of Dagon University Students' Union, Wooyi Aung, who is in prison had a lump on head but she did not get permission to get treated outside prison.<sup>5</sup> Aye Sandar Soe, head of Sagaing Education Univesity Students' Union, was arrested on 19th April 2021 and it has been 7 months, but no information about her has to date been released by the military.<sup>6</sup> On 5th April, Ma Wai (a mother) got arrested in Insein township, Yang and her three years old son, That Bhone Wai Yan was also arrested in his preschool which is located in Sinmin award, Alone township, Yangon.<sup>7</sup> However, no information is given where they were taken to. We strongly believe and analyze that arresting a child in his pre-school is undoubtedly comitting child rights and this action could result in negative psychological well-being for the child.

Members of military were unable to arrest the vice president of Mandalay District National League for Democracy (NLD), U Ko Ko, therefore, his wife, Daw Soe Soe was taken as hostage on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022 by soldiers arriving in five military trucks. Then after the interrogation, her dead body was thrown by the military group near the fire office, in the center of Mandalay, Road 35 on 18<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>8</sup> On March 8<sup>th</sup>, around 50 soldiers raided Inndauntnge village, Pauk Township, Magway division and robbed all public properties and fifty million kyats (Myanmar currency) amount of money and raped and killed a 42 year old mother, Aye Aye Win and also killed HER? 2 year old daughter, Yati Moe. Similarly, a runaway soldier disclosed that a woman from Thabyayaye village, Yinmar Township, Sagaing division was also killed. Her dead body was raped by three soldiers, from Battalion (368) named Win Thura, Maung Tu and Kyaw Zin Lat.<sup>9</sup> From our data collection, there have been more than six similar rape cases (OF DEAD BODIES?!!!) by the military during the last three months. Although under the current unstable political situation, women suffered these kinds of human right abuses, the perpetrators went unpunished as there is no proper administrative apparatus and no place to complain. By analyzing these cases, it could be concluded that military dictators commit these crimes in order to maintain their power.

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<sup>5</sup> Dagon University Students' Union, 12<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/SpeakUp4MyanmarWomen/posts/309536607978629>

<sup>6</sup> Myanmar Labour News, 20<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/myanmarlabournews/posts/774514593934267>

<sup>7</sup> RFA, 12<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/10161762557358128>

<sup>8</sup> Burmese Human Rights Network, 22<sup>nd</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/BHRNUK/posts/318395357068139>

<sup>9</sup> Khit Thit Media, Mar 22. <https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1453716865065655>

## ■ *Women and Economic Situation*

The price of commodities is increasing due to covid, civil wars within the country and in changing global politics. Alongside this increase in the price of commodities, price on cooking oil is also doubling.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, there are women who had to find any work to solve the struggles of living and daily food. Ma Soe Oo who sells grilled fish at night market in Yangon face challenges in selling as there is less customers and the rise in commodities price. She mentions in a media that “I don’t know when will I starve, I don’t also know what kind of work I should do as I have a child”.<sup>11</sup>

A disabled woman, Ma Shal reflects on her struggles that “income and outcome is not match as the price of commodities are rising. I had to use money very carefully to maintain living”.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, a disabled woman called Ma Yi Yi had her own printing business but now it had to shut down due to the military coup hence, she does not have any work at the moment. She said that “it is difficult to maintain living as there is no job. It could be worse in long-run”.<sup>13</sup> Disabled persons faced more challenges than others even in the normal circumstances for living and jobs. But now, the rise in the price of commodities and the lack of job opportunities makes them even more vulnerable. Through analyzing this situation, it could be assumed that lower class people are struggling for their living and daily food amid the rise in commodities’ price.

Moreover, women have had to find job abroad due to the lack of job opportunities in Myanmar. However, many migrants workers had to leave their jobs ABROAD? due to the spread of covid-19, but they are unable to go back to Myanmar due to current ongoing wars and instable political situation. A 31 years old, Naw Phaw, who works in Malaysia disclosed how military coup affected her, saying that “military coup in Myanmar also affect them who work abroad because we became hopeless as there is no job here and we become more stressful when we are unable to support our family inside Myanmar. So, I just wanna die in those times”.<sup>14</sup> Although she wants to go back home, she can’t as there is wars ongoing on in Karen State, Myanmar.

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<sup>10</sup> DVB, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. [http://burmese.dvb.no/archives/529711?fbclid=IwAR1NnYE-vAK9G\\_782w-erJVzI4AT-U1NM39wOUmGYMg3SvInWv7BMEFtjRg](http://burmese.dvb.no/archives/529711?fbclid=IwAR1NnYE-vAK9G_782w-erJVzI4AT-U1NM39wOUmGYMg3SvInWv7BMEFtjRg)

<sup>11</sup> HI, 4<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://web.facebook.com/honestinfo/posts/1984168145099918>

<sup>12</sup> HI, 18<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://web.facebook.com/honestinfo/posts/1994662880717111>

<sup>13</sup> HI, 18<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://web.facebook.com/honestinfo/posts/1994662880717111>

<sup>14</sup> HI, 16<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://web.facebook.com/honestinfo/posts/1993050627545003>

Workers inside Myanmar are also facing sexual harassment and violations of labor rights. Workers are told to work extra hours but this overtime is not compensated. In addition, women workers faced sexual harassment from the owners.<sup>15</sup> However, as there is no rule of law in Myanmar, perpetrators walk freely. Therefore, women workers did not dare to complain and kept silent on their experiences of sexual harassment as there are fewer job opportunities in Myanmar.

## Women's situation in Armed-conflicts

Women and children face the most challenges during armed conflicts. During the last three months, women and children lost their body parts and were killed due to indiscriminate shootings and shelling from the military junta and land-mines explosion. Refugees who went back their houses to get food supplies also stepped on land-mines and died as a result. Due to shells explosions in Padanyay village, Loikaw township, Kayah (Karenni) state, two women died and a man and three other women were severely injured.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, military group shells to Kalawday village, Hpapone district, Karen state, total five women and two men were dead including a two year old girl, a five year old girl and a pregnant woman. In addition, other four persons were severely injured.<sup>17</sup> Many lives were lost due to the military shelling houses and children playing with the unexploded heavy weaponry shells. There is a case in Minepyin areas, Hophone Township, Sothorn Shan state, when children picked up unexploded shell and played with it. As a result, a seven years old boy was killed and a woman lost her right hand.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is clearly visible to the fact that military juntas are violating rules and regulations of a war and targeting civilians. We strongly suggest that awareness on land-mines and unexploded weaponry shells to civilians including children are lacking and is needed.

In addition to impact of armed conflict, civilians are experiencing a breakdown of the rule of law. For example, increased in violence crimes such as murders. The murder of Mine Nuu Han, president of Ta'ang National Party (TNP) Minekine township, his wife Lway Aye Kha

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<sup>15</sup> HI, 29<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://bit.ly/3OJTKKp>

<sup>16</sup> Kantarawaddy Times, 7<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/KantarawaddyTimes/posts/4963224633796007>

<sup>17</sup> KIC, Mar 6. <https://www.facebook.com/KICNewsPage/posts/1903972469787565>

<sup>18</sup> Shan News, 28<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://web.facebook.com/shannewsburmese/posts/5085519028207166>



and their seven months old daughter is still unsolved? till today. The murder of this whole family - including a child - was suspected as being committed by the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS). However, RCSS released a press statement where they denied killing this family and acused the Shan State Progress party (SSPP) of the murders instead.<sup>19</sup> Although there have been mutual accusations between these armed groups, we strongly condemn this inhumane act of killing a whole family including a seven months old child.

Moreover, the number of villages burned down by members of military which they have raided have been increasing during the last three months. According to Data for Myanmar, a total (11,417) numbers of houses were torched down by members of the military from February 2021 to April 2022.

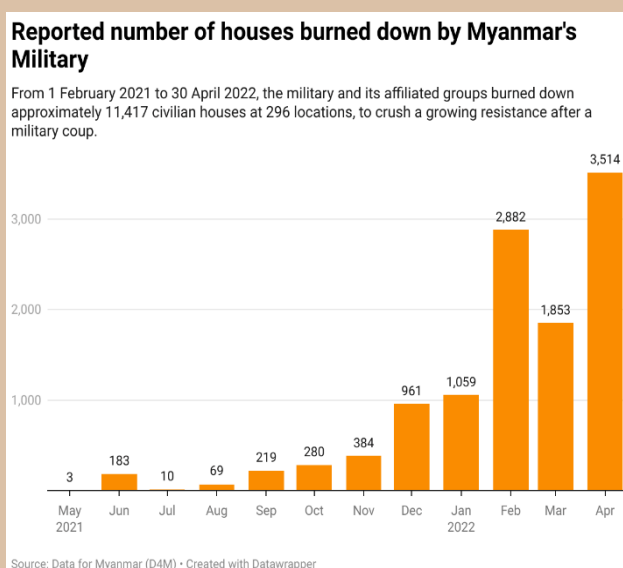


Photo 5: shows numbers of houses burned by month - photo from Data for Myanmar

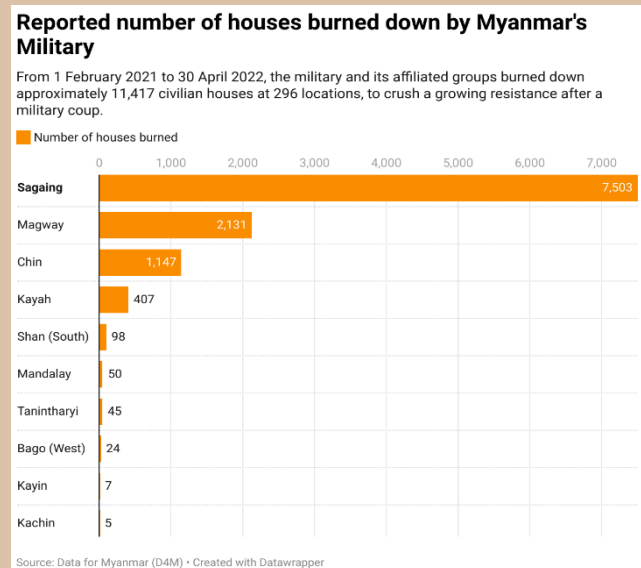


Photo 6: shows numbers of houses burned by State- photo from Data for Myanmar

<sup>19</sup> RFA, Mar 23. <https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/10161725989468128>

## IDPs Situation

Due to the fact that whole villages have been burned down and that armed conflicts between local PDFs and the military have intensified, the number of IDPs are rapidly increasing. In Rakhine state, people who had been forced to flee due to the civil war between the Arakan Army and the military (formally used as Tatmadaw) even before the coup (?) were unable to return home and humanitarian aids are not reaching to those IDPs camps. A woman from an IDPs camp in Rakhine said that<sup>20</sup>

"Nothing to eat. Rice was not received for more than two months. We are waiting for money support from WFP but it is not yet arrived. We just have to stay like this. We had to borrow from others. They also did not have anything left. Rice which we are cooking now is also from borrowing others. Our relatives also did not have any left."

Therefore, food supplies and humanitarian aid for an increasing number of IDPs after the coup are needed and also lacking. Due to strict inspection and tightened security check-points it is even harder for humanitarian aid to reach to those IDPs camps.



Photo 7: IDP situation in Kayah(Karenni State), photo from Kantarawaddy Times 2022/4/23 07:00

<sup>20</sup> RFA, 11<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=1036479720409680>

Military also bomb using jet fighters on Dawroutku village, Demoso Township, Kayah (Karenni) state where large numbers of displaced population shelter. Due to this bombing, displaced people have yet again having to be displaced. Hence, some of them have been displaced more than three times.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, we assume that the act of the military targeting civilians and IDPs camps with heavy weaponry shells is violating international law on rules to follow during war and also committing crimes against humanity.

IDPs in Kayah (Karenni) and Rakhine face drinking water scarcity under current summer weather. In order to get water, they have to walk for hours hence, it is a challenge for them.<sup>22</sup> Those IDPs need humanitarian aid and emergency response regarding water and food supplies which are essential for living. In addition, international communities need to put more pressure on the military who is preventing the transporting of humanitarian aid and arrest humanitarian aid workers.

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## Conclusion

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Women are continuously fighting against military juntas in any possible way they can and are because of this, subjected to arrest, murder, torture and long sentences. Because of daily intensified wars between local defense forces and the military, women and children become more vulnerable in armed conflicts. The military continuously violate international humanitarian law and engage in indiscriminate shootings and shelling directed towards civilians and IDPs camps. Therefore, we suggest that the international community need to enforce sanctions on the military and stop any cooperation with the military. Humanitarian aid and support from the international community should be directed via either the National Unity Government (NUG) or local organizations, instead of going via the military junta.

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<sup>21</sup> Kantarawaddy Times, 11<sup>th</sup> Mar 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/KantarawaddyTimes/posts/4892471750871296>

<sup>22</sup> The 74 Media, Mar 12. <https://www.facebook.com/The74Media/posts/518109463041913>