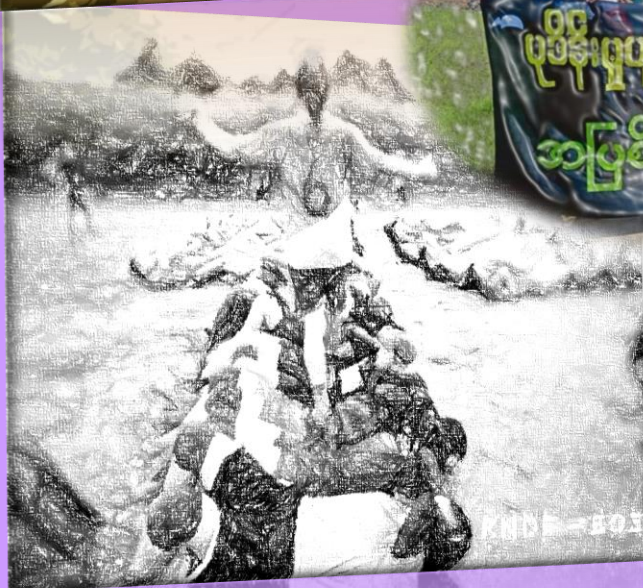




**BURMESE WOMEN'S UNION**



### **Situation of Women During the Attempted Coup**

**Women's Affairs News Analysis for one year between 1 February 2021 to 1 February 2022**

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## **Introduction:**

The 2020 general elections ended with criticism levelled against the National League for Democracy (NLD) for holding elections during the epidemic, with the National League for Democracy (NLD) again winning the majority of the votes. Although there was political tension between the government and the military, the public did not expect the military to carry out a coup d'état. But on 1 February 2022, the military conducted a coup and arrested political leaders, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Three days after the coup, tens of thousands of people started to protest peacefully against the military dictatorship in many big cities across the country, demanding the release of arrested leaders. Since then, people across the country have made political demands in unity, from rejecting the military dictatorship to establishing the federal democratic union. Women participated in the front line of demonstrations.

The military have violated many rights against women, including killing, arbitrary arrest, unlawful interrogation, threatening, torture, sexual harassment, deprivation of rights to access to health services during the detention, and refusal of rights to meet with family members during detention and in the prisons. To protest these inhumane practices, women have participated in the front role of the demonstration against the military dictatorship. Women have also joined the armed struggle in both urban and rural areas, fighting the military junta, whereas other participate in peaceful demonstrations.

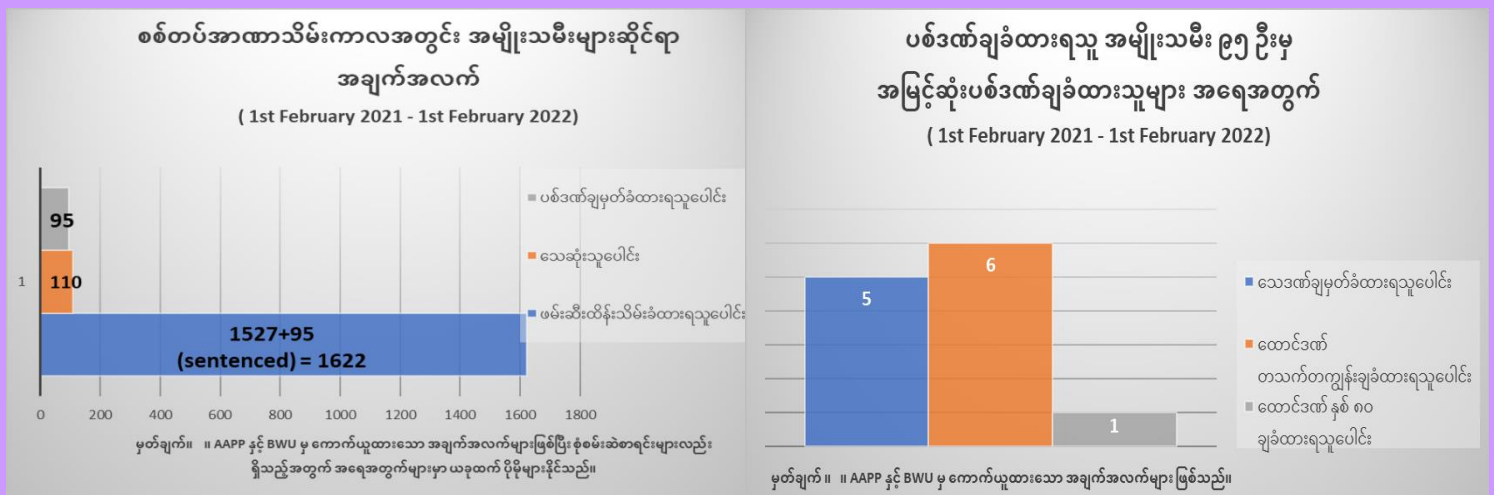
At the same time, fighting has intensified across the country and the number of women IDPs are more than half of the number of all IDPs. The IDPs in different States are facing shortage of food, shelter and medicine. For example, IDPs in Rakhine State are facing difficulties to receive food and humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, some women and children who fled from fighting to the IDP camps or elsewhere have killed by bullets and heavy weaponry shells and have also been injured by stepping on landmines planted by military troops.

## Situation of women after the coup

### Political Movement of the women

Due to military junta's brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators on February 9, Mya Thwet Thwet Khine (19 years old female) was shot dead. She was the first protestor who sacrificed her life in Myanmar's Spring Revolution. Although the military troops were brutally cracking down on demonstrators, the demonstrations led by women were not stopped. The columns led by women such as "21 century Panhtwar Queens Column", "Root out the dictator by those who swing the cradle"; "Our Sarong, our flag, our victory" "Women with the power, I will destroy the rape army", "Women who will crush the army raise their hands between the bars";. Until now, women led demonstrations can be seen everywhere.

Women involved in such political activities have also been subjected to torture and ill-treatment by the military, as well as arbitrary detention and imprisonment. 1622 women have been arrested, with 95 women sentenced to imprisonment since February 1, 2021.



Receiving the highest possible punishment, 5 women were given death penalties and 6 women faced life imprisonment. Those who were arrested and charged were deprived of their rights to get a fair trial and rights to appeal.

The majority of women who were arrested lost contact with their family members after being arrested. Sometimes, their follow up information could not be obtained. A 9<sup>th</sup> grade female student from Monyin, in Kachin State, was tortured at interrogation center for allegations of contacting people's defense forces; her family were not allowed to meet her for more than two months.

Detained women were not only tortured at the military interrogation centers, they were also sexually harassed. The military junta used these tactics so that the participation of the women in politics will be reduced. At an interrogation center, a woman was sexually abused by military soldiers in front of her own father.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Win Win Ko, held at an interrogation center, was forced to drink alcohol. Soldiers touched her breasts and attempted to rape her.<sup>2</sup> Soe Mee Mee Kyaw tried to kill herself by drinking spirit (concentrated alcohol) due to the torture she experienced at the interrogation center. The above mentioned incidents indicate that military is inhumanly torturing detained people, including women.

To avoid being tortured, some women sacrificed their lives rather than letting the military arrest them. Pan Thee (a) Wai Wai Myint jumped to her death from the apartment building she lived in after military troops had entered her apartment, trying to arrest her.

On the other hand, the detainees didn't get proper health care and some women lost their lives. While Daw Khin Mar Yee (a) Pwar Cho was detained with article 505(b) at Minkin police station, she asked the authority to let her treat her diabetes, but she was refused. This cost her her life.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Ma Moe Thu @ Moe Thuzar Htwe got COVID and passed away on July 22 after she was refused to get treatment.<sup>4</sup>

Women are keen for the spring revolution to succeed and escape from the oppression of the military. Some joined the people's defense force and some joined only female guerilla troops.

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<sup>1</sup> MyanmarPressphoto, Aug 24, <https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/6054855867888723>

<sup>2</sup> Myanmar Now, Jan 17, <https://www.myanmar-now.org/mm/news/10110>

<sup>3</sup> KhitThit Media, July 22, <https://www.facebook.com/khitthitnews/posts/1252839011820109>

<sup>4</sup> Burma News Network, July 24

It is observed that the military junta kills, arrests, tortures, keeps the information secret and sexually assaults people including women, girls, and even children, in order to scare them away from politics.

Women are joining the fight against the brutal military from any role they can. The military coup in Myanmar has not yet succeeded.

## ▪ **Women and Economic Situation**

Women faced challenges for daily lives due to the situation after the attempted coup as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. From shopping to health care, they have faced difficulties due to the shortage of money.

Before the military coup even, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not difficult to withdraw money from the banks as the banking system were working well, and banks and ATMs were running according to COVID rules. But, since the military coup, many skillful bank staffs joined the civil disobedience movement (CDM) and banks could not run systematically. Moreover, people lost trust in banks which were controlled by the military and tried to withdraw all their savings. Banks could not run normally. Therefore, businessmen who keep the money in the banks give the people who want to get their money from the bank by taking 57% of the money. People faced difficulties even to get their own money back.

On the other hand, due to the military coup people from Myanmar lost the trust on its own currency Myanmar Kyat and bought and held foreign currencies such as US dollar or Thai Baht. So, since the military coup in February, value of Myanmar Kyat dropped dramatically and US 1 \$ was about 17,000 kyats.<sup>5</sup> Scarce of circulating money, dramatic drop of Myanmar kyat value and difficulties in transportation due to strict checking, the commodity prices became higher and higher.

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<sup>5</sup> The Standard Time Daily, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/standardtimedaily/posts/3959407277504530>

When the price of commodities increased, the first to be hit were housewives. Lack of jobs and high commodity price force some women to sell their own hair to survive.<sup>6</sup> Some women work as motorbike taxi drivers for living. Precariously employed women, who mostly work in the informal industry, are facing a lack of jobs at the same time as commodity prices are increasing. After the military coup, 256 garment factories out of 741 shut down, where 80% of labor comes from women.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, more than 150,000 garment workers became jobless. So, the survival for living became a big challenge.

Therefore, some women who lost their jobs in the garment industry and other industries, and instead became sex workers.<sup>8</sup> Su Thet started to work at a KTV after the military coup as there was no other job. She had been facing difficulties for her living. **“Now, I have to struggle hard. Sometime, I cannot give money to my family. I need to pay “line money” to police. Whether I work or not or there is customer or not, we need to pay police money”,** she said. UNDP estimates that 25 million people will face starvation next year in Burma due to the combined effects of COVID-19 and political instability.<sup>9</sup>

## ▪ Violence against Women

Violence against women increased after the military coup. The perpetrators were incentivized due to the military coup and the lack of rule of law.

People connected to the military and soldiers entered into a house and raped several times a 7-month pregnant woman while her husband was held at the gun point.<sup>10</sup> Similarly a 60 year old woman from northern Shan State was raped by a soldier and military had to issue a statement

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<sup>6</sup> HI, Dec 4, <https://bit.ly/3lxugmq>

<sup>7</sup> RFA, Nov 9, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1028429607718680>

<sup>8</sup> HI, Sep 19, <https://bit.ly/3jeD3IU>

<sup>9</sup> RFA, Dec 9, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=1056545088412233>

<sup>10</sup> Irrawaddy, Nov 19

[https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2021/11/19/247573.html?fbclid=IwAR3pgkfUKG4Gckj\\_osLfJsMkUbO4yd\\_iLMrb1gw8Xh7dWXbldGnH23EUgRU](https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/interview/2021/11/19/247573.html?fbclid=IwAR3pgkfUKG4Gckj_osLfJsMkUbO4yd_iLMrb1gw8Xh7dWXbldGnH23EUgRU)

on November 11 that they would punish the soldier after the incident was reported. But, the punishments are not transparent as usual. No clear action has been taken to those associated with the military since in the past. Last November, Tin Maw Lin, who was two months pregnant, passed away while being interrogated brutally by two police officers at the residence of the Deputy Director of the Maubin Township General Administration Office for the loss of household things. The two police officers who caused the deaths were transferred without any punishment. Furthermore, a 51 years old woman from Nomlan village in Moemauk Township in Kachin State, was raped and killed by three soldiers. However, the military-controlled New Light of Myanmar newspaper claimed that the woman was killed during a quarrel with soldiers who got angry with her. The Infantry Division 88 and Light Infantry Battalion 616 gave the family a compensation and apologized.<sup>11</sup>

May Moe, who participated in the launch of the Women's League of Burma book, *Barriers in Every Turn*, said that more women were threatened with obscene images and videos and raped during the period of coup. Sexual violence against young women is on the rise, with the rule of law completely eroded. The perpetrators were doing these violations openly as there is no proper administrative apparatus and no place to complain. As a result, the victims or survivors are facing challenges to get justice. Many young victims of sexual violence in Burma keep silent, as they are afraid of social isolation, and of being shamed and victim blamed by their community.

Women in urban areas faced more sexual harassments and exploitation at the work place after the military coup. The female workers at Chinese own Xinda Home Textile garment factory, are facing not only harassment but also unfair dismissal. Women were compensated with small amount of money for experiencing sexual violations. Giving reason as scarcity of jobs, the business owners exploited the workers and taking advantage of lack of rule of law, they sexually harassed and committed sexual violence against female workers. Due to the lack of job opportunities, some female workers kept silence.

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<sup>11</sup> The 74 Media, July 15

Women are also facing more incidents of domestic violence during this period. BWU could not record how much increase in domestic violence. Due to the current political crisis and civil war, people give less attention to domestic violence. Organization helping or providing services to women survivors are having a hard time: they could not go and meet victims and survivors due to armed conflicts in the areas or strict check points of the military junta.

The military junta, the State Administrative Council, are not willing to promote or protect the rights of women. At the same time, they are perpetrating serious women human rights including arbitrary arrests, killings and sexual violence. As currently the situation of Burma is under the military junta, there is no way to effectively reduce the violence and help the survivors of the violence.

## ▪ **Women and Health**

The health sector has deteriorated during the coup. The government's plan to vaccinate nearly half of Burma's population against COVID-19 pandemic, which was decided by the government before the military coup, was thwarted by the coup, and the death toll from COVID-19 has risen sharply. In addition, children and pregnant women are deprived of their regular immunization rights.

In addition to suspicious raids on hospitals and clinics, doctors helping people have been arrested. In the early days of the coup, hospitals could not treat outpatients due to the spread of



COVID-19. Unable to access treatment, 9 pregnant women in Rakhine State<sup>12</sup> and many others in other States and Regions had died. Due to the suppression and arrests during the period of coup, it was difficult to get accurate information.

In addition, a charity clinic in Loikaw, which provides free medical

care to outpatients, was raided by military council troops and volunteers were taken away. As a result, the clinic had to temporarily close.<sup>13</sup> The clinic was used by those who could not afford treatment in private hospital, including pregnant women. This made it difficult for pregnant women who had to give birth to their babies without due medical attention. This analysis shows that the military disregarded the health sector to maintain their power.

## ▪ **Women's situation in armed conflicts**

Currently, war is almost everywhere. The people from areas where there was no fighting are now armed to fight the military dictatorship. Fighting and destructions are experienced daily. The military are using excessive weapons, including use air strikes. Bombing civilians are in clear violation of international laws. They are also attacking and burning down villages. Due to these atrocities conducted by the military council, people have had to flee and hide every day, including women, children and elderly people who are facing difficulties and challenges.

The military council also carried out airstrikes and bombing on IDP camps in Karenni State. As a result, two girls, aged 12 and 15, died.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the military council burnt alive at least

<sup>12</sup> Development Media Group, Aug 9

<sup>13</sup> Kantarawaddy Times, Nov 22, <https://www.facebook.com/KantarawaddyTimes/posts/4518021531649655>

<sup>14</sup> Kantarawaddy Times, Jan 17, <https://www.facebook.com/KantarawaddyTimes/posts/4716723315112808>

35 people, including women and children, near Moso village, Phruso Township in Karenni State.<sup>15</sup> The data was based on the reports made by news organizations and there could be more people dead or injured on the ground.

In the fighting, the indiscriminate shooting from military troops, innocent women and children become victims. At Kalay Myo, military troops shot and shelled the town, injured a 5 years-old boy, after he was unable to move his legs and hands.<sup>16</sup> In addition, after indiscriminate shooting by military troops, two shells exploded in front of the house of a woman who came back from her farm situated between Demoso and Phruso.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of the targeted attacks on civilians, some IDPs don't know where to go and some have fled to the jungle caves. While fleeing, mothers carry their babies and carry as much food as they can. Some pregnant women could not even bring necessary medicine with them.

In addition, the troops from the military do not spare women, using them as porters and human shields. Some soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 341 and 410 abducted three women from Thopadae village in Papon District in Karen State and forced them to work as porters while using them as human shield taking them to Chawchinday village.<sup>18</sup>

*Photo 2: photo from Mizzima*



<sup>15</sup> RFA, Dec 28, <https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/10161566254108128>

<sup>16</sup> Zalen, Jul 16, <https://www.facebook.com/zalen.info/posts/3105763399644510>

<sup>17</sup> Kantarawaddy Times, Aug 12, <https://www.facebook.com/KantarawaddyTimes/posts/4201841539934324>

<sup>18</sup> Salween Press, Aug 23

Due to the fighting, security on travel routes has been tightened, and displaced people are finding it difficult to even to go back to their home to bring food back. It is also dangerous for people as landmines have also been planted in villages occupied by the junta. It can be concluded that women, pregnant women and children face difficulties getting enough food and nutrition. In addition, monthly sanitary pads for women are difficult to get as well due to transportation difficulties.

People had to flee without harvesting the crops due to immediate military offensive resulting in reduced production and destruction of crops due to the late harvest. In addition, soldiers from the military have destroyed or burned down harvested paddy when they raided villages. Therefore, people who used to live on growing crops, are now worrying for their livelihood and food.<sup>19</sup>

In the areas of war, Burmese military troops planted landmines where they have passed or they have stationed and some women and children lost their limbs and lives. A brother and a sister who were looking after their cow, were injured due to landmine blast.<sup>20</sup> A mother and a daughter who came back from their farm in Mindat area in Chin State stepped in a mine: the mother died on the spot and the daughter was seriously injured from a landmine.<sup>21</sup>

Some children were killed after they found unexploded heavy weaponry shells and played with them. A twelve year old child from Nang Mun in Indawgyi areas, was killed when the shell he was playing exploded.<sup>22</sup> It is obvious that mine clearing campaign together with mine education to the displaced people are needed before they go back to their homes.

## ▪ **Situation of Displaced People**

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<sup>19</sup>Kantawaddy Times, Dec 13, <https://bit.ly/3ESOL4D>

<sup>20</sup> Voice of Myanmar, Aug 16, <https://www.facebook.com/VoiceofMyanmarNews/posts/900158563919151>

<sup>21</sup> Chin World Media, Dec 6, <https://www.facebook.com/chinworldmedia/posts/274422368053435>

<sup>22</sup> The Voice of Shan Ni, Oct 22, <https://www.facebook.com/shannivoicenewsjournal/posts/2637362856559738>

The displaced population is increasing rapidly as the fighting is spreading in different areas across the country. As fighting intensified at Lay Kay Kaw in Karen State, more than 4,500 civilians were displaced. A pregnant woman had given birth very difficultly while she was on the run.<sup>23</sup> In addition, more than half the population in Karenni State became displaced since the fighting intensified after New Year day. Since May 2021, fierce fighting in Demawso Township left the displaced people without food rations and the war refugees got only rice support and are in need of cooking oil, salt and other food rations.<sup>24</sup>

The existing refugees in Rakhine State could not go back home, and access to humanitarian aid became a challenge during the military coup. The military council has arrested and detained a number of humanitarian aid workers. Strict inspections of travelers and trucks and restrictions on access to the IDP areas have limited access to where aid is needed. Therefore, the refugees now face a lack of food and about 40,000 women<sup>25</sup> from refugee camps in Rakhine State and displaced women in other States are in need of sanitary pads for monthly use. In Mro refugee camp in Kyauktaw Township in Rakhine State adolescence young women are being teased and bullied by men and suffering mental disturbances due to lack of underwear.<sup>26</sup>

Currently it is still in winter and almost all the refugee and IDP camps need warm clothes and blankets. As IDPs have to sleep on the rain proof plastic sheets, there can be health implications. As fighting intensified at Demawso Township in Karenni State, a 5 year old displaced child got life threatening stroke after he had to sleep on the rain proof plastic sheet under cold winter weather.<sup>27</sup> In addition more than 700 displaced people who fled from fighting between Shan Armed Groups, need food, warm clothes and blankets.<sup>28</sup> In some part of Karenni State, due to lack of rice people have had to eat maize.

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<sup>23</sup> Myanmar Pressphoto Agency, Dec 22, <https://www.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/6733926583314978>

<sup>24</sup> Kantarawaddy Times, Dec 15, [https://ktnews.org/displaced-civilians-still-hungry-despite-aid-reaching-camps-in-karenni-state/?fbclid=IwAR0sVIH7epo6iRTyl2Tx9d9\\_ZU5vjJhxxwIlkh0nASr3P8o00sq66vJcxTw](https://ktnews.org/displaced-civilians-still-hungry-despite-aid-reaching-camps-in-karenni-state/?fbclid=IwAR0sVIH7epo6iRTyl2Tx9d9_ZU5vjJhxxwIlkh0nASr3P8o00sq66vJcxTw)

<sup>25</sup> Development Media Group, Sep 4

<sup>26</sup> Mro Ethnic in Myanmar, Jan 15, <https://www.facebook.com/mroethnicinmyanmar/posts/887997951840903>

<sup>27</sup> Ayarwaddy Times, Dec 15, <https://www.facebook.com/ayeyarwaddytimes/posts/2061577580666899>

<sup>28</sup> Shan News, Dec 6, <https://www.facebook.com/shannewsburmese/posts/4628847167207690>

Furthermore, there are water shortage problems in Karenni and Rakhine IDP camps and they have to use all possible water source such as muddy water or dirty water.<sup>29</sup> Based on this, we conclude that people may get health problem as they could not take care of personal hygiene due to water shortage.

## ▪ Conclusion

Despite the grave risks women are facing, including being used as human shields by the military, facing mental and physical abuse, sexual violence and rape, shooting and killing, being burned alive, arrested and tortured, they are risking their lives to liberate themselves from the dictatorship and keen to participate in any role possible that they can play in the revolution, including the armed struggle.

Due to political instability and the war, women, girls and children are facing starvation, insecurity and life threatening danger. Most of the conflict zones, including their home areas are now planted with landmines and indiscriminate shooting by military troops, many women and children lost their lives or limbs.

We analyze that due to inhumane activities of military regime, there will be more resistance. People 's resistance will be stronger and more people will be displaced. In order to create fear among the people, the military will destruct the properties of the people and kill more people and there will be more devastation. To stop war crimes against women and children and to stop the devastation of the country, only solution is the international community, including the UN security council, to impose worldwide armed embargo to Burmese Military Junta.

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<sup>29</sup>Narinjara, Jan 15, [facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/5098683363477033](https://facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/5098683363477033) ,Katarawaddy Times, Jan 10.

## Recommendations

- International Community is called to take immediate action against the Burmese Military Junta who had committed all the atrocities against the people including from arbitrary arrests and detentions during the mass protests across the country to sexual exploitation, rape and beatings of innocent civilians, and burning the people to death, in line with international human rights standards. He called on the international community to take immediate action against all military atrocities, including arson, in line with international human rights standards.
- International community including United Nations should accelerate pressuring Burmese military junta to end the use of fighter jets in civil war; use of civilians as human shields and use of airstrikes on IDP camps and to end targeted attacks on IDP, and refer the situation of Myanmar (Burma) to International Criminal Court (ICC) for violation of international Human Rights laws on the innocent people and for war crimes.
- As military junta is destroying lives and properties of the people by using military grade weapons, International Community is urged to ban the trade of arms and ammunitions and stop supporting military technology. In addition, International Community including United Nations should make the resolution immediately for the demarcation of no-fly zone as military council is using planes to bomb the civilians.
- As the death toll of children and women due to the remnants of military weapons is increasing, we want the relevant organizations to provide the necessary technology and equipment for demining and weapons clearance.
- As fighting intensifies across the country, the number of refugees and IDPs is increasing, and international humanitarian assistance is urgently needed. We urge the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to local civil society organizations and civil-based organizations through any means possible.