



BURMESE WOMEN'S UNION



Women News Analysis Paper January to December 2023

9 January 2024

1 Summary

Throughout 2023, the terrorist military engaged in various forms of violence against civilians, including artillery shelling, crimes against humanity, bombings, human shields, and sexual harassment and assault of women. Despite their oppressive tactics, which affect civilians, significantly for women, there is evidence that the military's control over much of the territories of the country is eroding. As a result, attacks on civilians are becoming more widespread, increasing the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) daily.

Women are most severely impacted by the breakdown of political, military, social, and economic sectors, grappling with the burden of increasing debts. Middle-aged and young women are compelled to look for work beyond borders, using legal and illegal channels. Unfortunately, their journeys abroad expose them to severe human rights violations, including rape, particularly in Middle Eastern countries like Iraq—previously less considered among them.

Furthermore, domestic violence and gender discrimination become more widespread, driven by conservative beliefs that prevail in the home country, where safety remains uncertain.

Despite challenges, women's political participation and their resilience in opposing the patriarchal system remain influential, paralyzing the junta's power grip. Except for the active involvement of women themselves, public knowledge and engagement in women's rights are noticeably weak.

Women's political activities, security, economic, and their situations under armed conflict and terrorizing military throughout 2023 will be provided herein.

The data and facts presented in this analysis paper were compiled by the Burmese Women's Union (BWU) from reliable news media outlets and statements issued by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). Numerous limitations and challenges remain concerning accessing and validating information directly from the ground. As such, the BWU is certain that the actual numbers may be higher than reported here.

2.1 Women's Political Activities

Throughout 2023, it was found that women's political participation in the form of women's strikes to topple the terrorist military was not fading away. Women led march-protests were held in 2023 in Launglon township, Dawei district, with the slogan "The pen is mightier than the sword, but the mightiest is the power of women," organized by the women's union called the Hnin Si Yaung.¹ Similarly, a women's group in Sagaing continued to carry out the campaigns in 2023, with the slogan "Red blood of peacocks, Victory banners high! Saviors none we seek, Villagers folks as we are! Golden Yekyi will unfurl the flag of victory, too! Our fervor shall never die. We of the golden bloodline!"²

In addition, women actively participated in the fight against the terrorist military, some demonstrating their determination by taking up arms. Notably, Chin women fighters in the Chin National Defense Force (CNDF) courageously fought on the front lines,³ while women affiliated with the Mandalay People Defense Force (PDF Mandalay) played a vital part in the revolution, rallying the public to seize the territory.⁴

In 2023, various organizations, including women-led groups in Myanmar and independent entities, actively participated in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (GBV). This initiative witnessed the active engagement of IDPs. The Kachin Gender Star Group (KGSG), for instance, conducted events near Mai Ja Yang in Kachin State, involving 300 IDP women across four different locations.⁵ Approximately 200 migrant workers joined the 16-day campaign in Mae Sot, Thailand.⁶ Simultaneously, women's alliance groups organized a protest participating in the 16-day Campaign in Yinmarbin township, Sagaing Region.⁷ The Ministry of Women, Youths, and

¹ Democracy Movement Strike Committee-Dawei, 29 Oct 2023

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02Z8v6Gbq7CWzgw18VX28c46vkuHpt1ZCaevRpDMCqrBTAzzVosXe74Amr3xXkCqrHsl&id=100069366962829

² Delta News Agency, 4 Oct 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/deltanewsagency/posts/pfbid0w92KtULZm7fnfnQvsMFs5TarzrUJdTRo3bPFyZoZDEXa78yAad18KCa4JYEKu3mg1>

³ Lwin Khet News, 5 Oct 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=1449198572320288>

⁴ Burma VJ, 16 Sep 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/bvjmedia/posts/pfbid0Tnr1bHDTyRpZ5ZDywsUi2fbgDGYEflvo84ZjkbBTRPug6J4RPv2phz5eM3Z5oL4l>

⁵ Kachin Gender Star, 27 Nov 2023

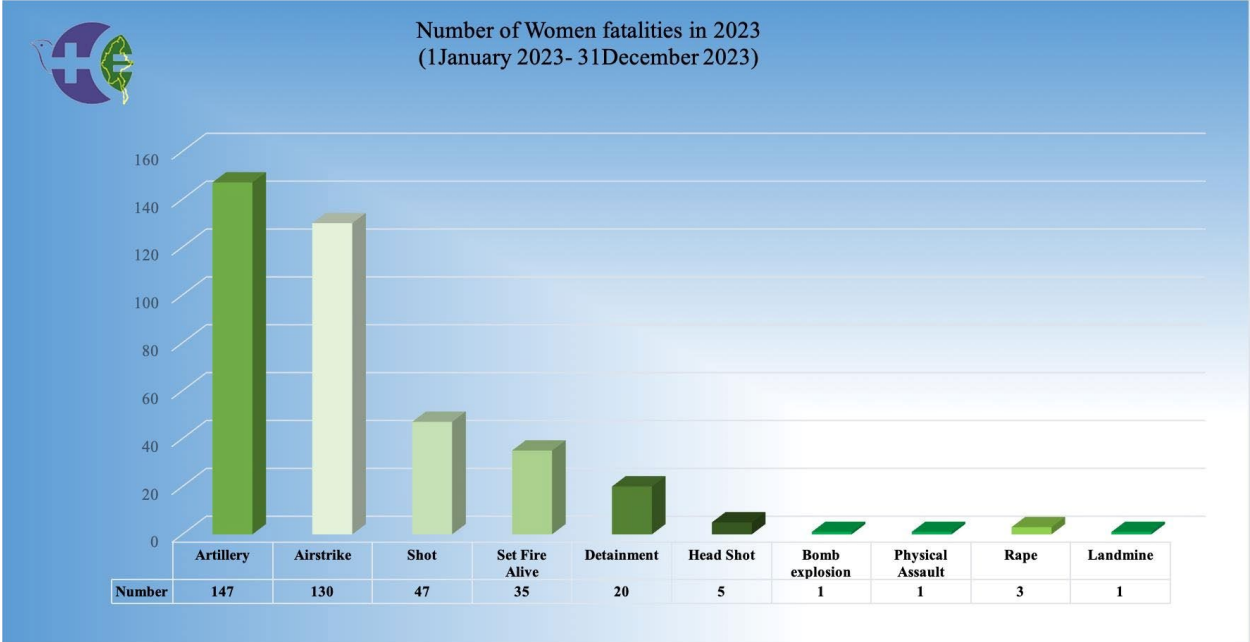
https://web.facebook.com/100076940633095/posts/353508630557155/?_rdc=1&_rdr

⁶ HI-Honest Information, 25 Nov 2023 https://web.facebook.com/100079788362744/posts/332211192781824/?mibextid=cr9u03&_rdc=1&_rdr

⁷ Khit Thit Media, 4 Dec 2023

https://web.facebook.com/100066528465996/posts/710058167888459/?mibextid=cr9u03&_rdc=1&_rdr

Children Affairs (MOWYCA) under the National Unity Government (NUG) collaborated in joint activities with alliance members and groups from both local and international levels. Notably, the activities were prevalent in the Sagaing Region.⁸

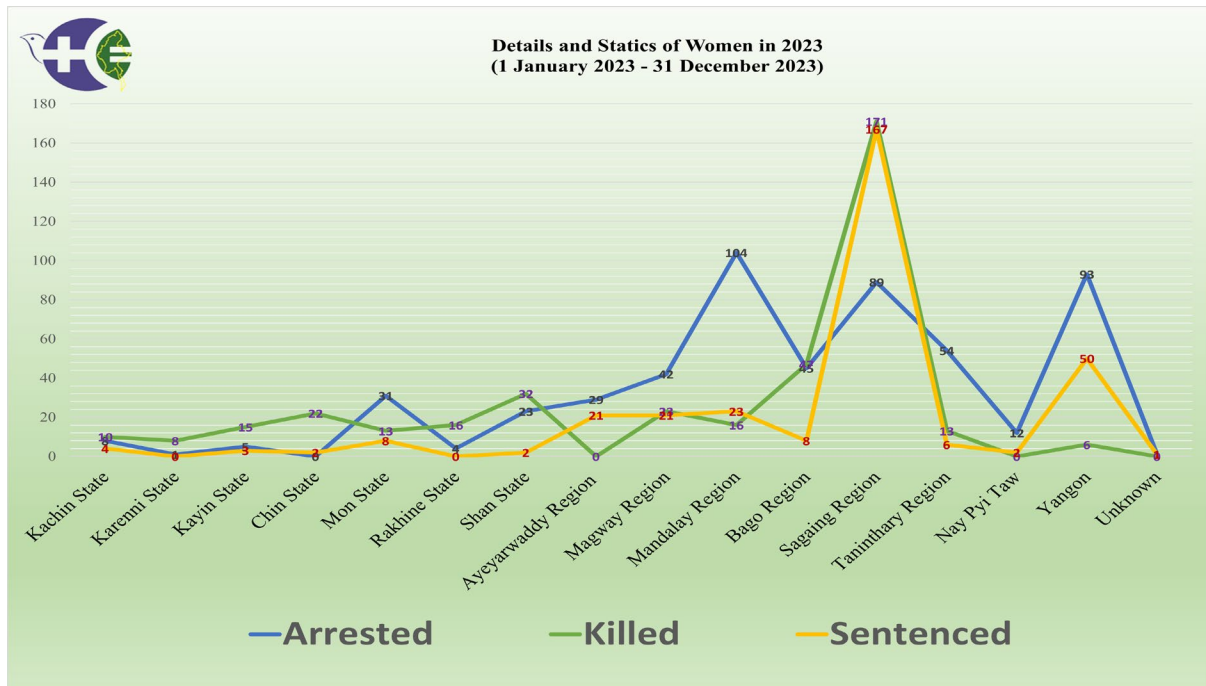


2.2 Women’s Security Situation

Safety and security for women in Myanmar deteriorated significantly in 2023, as demonstrated by widespread human rights violations (HRVs), particularly instances of sexual harassment and assault across the country. Among the various forms of abuse documented, sexual harassment and assault against women emerged as a disturbingly prevalent and persistent issue. It was reported that those responsible for such acts included not only members of the terrorist military but also members of the revolutionary forces who engaged in sexual harassment and assault against women during the conflict.

⁸ Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs, 9 Dec 2023.
<https://web.facebook.com/mowyca/posts/pfbid02thKK8ziR1t1tpbxqzFkeRQ33DHLC3b5DAFNPr6Giu8n6QqB7rxNRcgXx7uoZb6T6l>

The BWU's data and conflict analysis found that seven cases of rape took place in the conflict-torn region of Rakhine between September and 19 October, within the period of 49 days only.⁹ These victims included both children and mentally disabled girls and women, with the vast majority from rural areas.



Numerous cases also emerged in which women were detained, reportedly for political reasons, and according to the data released by the AAPP and the BWU's data collection, the terrorist military detained 541 women between 1 January and 31 December 2023. The majority of these women were accused of disseminating false information on social media. Some were detained allegedly having communication or in contact with the NUG, revolutionary groups, and other resistance armed forces. Notably, the majority of women arrested in 2023 were from the Mandalay Region.

Within a timeframe of one year, from 1 January to 31 December 2023, a total of 392 women were brutally killed while 318 women were detained. The circumstances surrounding the fatalities varied with 130 women killed by airstrikes, 147 killed by artillery shelling, one killed by a bomb explosion, 20 during arrests or while in custody, another one killed by landmine, one was subjected

⁹ Western News, 19 Oct 2023
<https://www.facebook.com/westernnewsagency/posts/pfbid02mKW46kD3C4Wdg7rLEaQGQtQ3b1qDDkGMFDw99bTcs7VKZjA21h1jhFMJLb6UzB7ml>

to harsh treatments or torture by the terrorist military, 35 were burned, 3 were raped and killed, 47 were shot dead, and five were killed by headshots. The majority of those sentenced and killed were from the Sagaing Region.

According to the information that the BWU gathered, the health, physical, and mental well-being of women political prisoners currently detained was at a critical stage, with the added hardship of insufficient access to essential healthcare services in the prisons they are held.

2.3 Women's Economic Situation

Myanmar's economic crisis is having a devastating impact on the general public particularly on women.

It was reported that the plight of women workers in Yangon's garment factories, where HRVs such as inadequate or low wages and cutting overtime pay, became widespread. Many employers committed human rights abuses against their employees such as cutting from the daily wage of 4800 Kyats if the employee failed to meet the daily quota, forcing employees to work overtime without pay and unlawfully denying them full-time status after three months of probation.¹⁰

People in Myanmar struggled to survive and even having one meal per day became difficult. Some even considered selling their organs to overcome their financial hardship.

According to an agent with a decade of experience in the market of selling body organs, the number of people selling the organs doubled within six months of the coup. The current market price for a kidney has risen to 7,000,000 kyats (seven million). Faced with the pressing need for survival and necessities, organ sellers could not consider potential health consequences, instead, they prioritized immediate concerns of survival.

On top of deteriorating situations like organ sales, young and middle-aged women opted to adventure out to migrate abroad as a way to escape from Myanmar which lacks safety and security despite the potential danger, they faced on their journey. In the past, countries like Singapore,

¹⁰ The Irrawaddy- Burmese Edition, 7 Oct 2023
https://burma.irrawaddy.com/article/2023/10/07/375142.html?fbclid=IwAR23oyBHXeLJqfv3c26XJmHFun6VmW79hfmGUkN1twTvSbPtmFiAumh7o_8

Malaysia, and Thailand used to be destinations for Myanmar migrants. However, a discernible trend now shows a typical migration pattern to some countries in the Middle East after 2022. Unfortunately, political insecurity in Myanmar means that women are exposed to labor exploitation, which is exacerbated by inadequate laws and accountability mechanisms. On 29 November 2023, the Myanmar Labour News reported on its Facebook post that approximately 60 women who aimed to migrate to Dubai were stuck in Oman where all of them struggled to live in a small space and shared limited food as there was no jobs readily available and those who had jobs were not paid for several months.¹¹

Disturbingly, some women working abroad were subjected to sexual harassment, abuse, and rape. In June 2023, a Myanmar woman working in Baghdad, Iraq, was raped. Her attempts to file charges were unsuccessful and by September 2023 her situation worsened when she was thrown out of the house by her employer. According to another report by Highlights in October, the manager of the migrant worker agency in Baghdad took women to his residence where he raped a migrant woman three times, inflicted physical abuse, and threatened her with guns.¹²

Throughout 2023, the general public faced persistent economic hardships. Inflation caused the hike in commodity prices for essential items such as rice, oil, and salt to double the prices significantly affecting women who usually managed household-related tasks. In addition, residents in Pauk township, Magway Region, were forced to replace rice with yam tuber in their diet regime due to rice scarcity, exemplifying the severe impact of economic hardships on their daily life.

3 Women's Situation under Armed Conflict

As the relentless intensity of civil wars waged in most parts of the country, women had to cope with mental health issues. The terrorist military continued to commit atrocities, including airstrikes, the use of chemical weapons, and the indiscriminate bombing of entire villages, all while disregarding international rules and norms.

¹¹ Myanmar Labour News, 29 Nov 2023

<https://web.facebook.com/myanmarlabournews/posts/pfbid0ExergCpr422wjxSoDheGinLyTKPG95CHpiuGUze6BDMbyHMTKuSyPOKYcKBLz0swl>

¹² Highlight, 1 Oct 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/highlightstoriesandvoices/posts/pfbid02NnTqwsGaoK26jBMs9HxegJ6fANYiJ4cBYbv6688Vo3BeXuNeG6ABuv4kqL8djhMQl>

In 2023, a particularly tragic incident took place on 9 October during an attack on civilians in the Munglai Hkyet IDP camp near Laiza. There were 29 civilians killed, including 10 children under the age of 18, 15 women, and 3 men.¹³ Similar atrocities perpetrated by the terrorist military occurred in Pazigy village, Kantbalu township in Sagaing Region, Anang Pa in Hpakant township, Kachin State, and Let Yat Kone, Sagaing Region. The vast majority of those killed in these cases were women and children.¹⁴ There had been 22 massacres since the revolution and resistance against the military began over two and a half years ago, each massacre involving ten or more people. Among them, the Sagaing Region had the most severe cases, with 14 occurrences, followed by Kachin State, which had three.¹⁵

The terrorist military continued its inhumane and brutal attack of extrajudicial killings, using airstrikes and village raids as its preferred method. Since October 2023, the military has carried out brutal assaults on villages in Depayin township, Sagaing Region, resulting in horrific extrajudicial killings of villagers, including the elderly. During this incident, at least five people were killed, with at least four people being beheaded and their limbs severed, in an alarming revelation. The gruesome nature of these acts made proper identification extremely difficult because the bodies were interfered with and attacked by wild animals or dogs.

Data analysis by the BWU from 14 December 2022 to 10 November 2024, based on the statements of the Nyan Linn Thit Analytica, there were at least 2,409 clashes between the terrorist military and the revolutionary forces and 932 airstrikes from 15 February to 10 November 2023 across Myanmar.

According to the Data for Myanmar, a stark reality emerged as nearly 80,000 houses (76,923 to be exact) burned to the ground set alight by the terrorist military and its militia during their attempted military coup. From 1 February 2021 to 31 October 2023, the highest destruction was reported in Sagaing Region. The Sagiang Region was the area that defiantly resisted the military attacks as

¹³ BNI-Myanmar Peace Monitor, 10 Oct 2023. [WNR_Issue-125_MMR.pdf](#)

¹⁴ The 74 Media, 10 Oct 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/The74Media/posts/pfbid02TrMdmx47qFztVHWKP2z54BCT2pw61eaWVfsgB5js27UL3Wgy44VBF2nC4jigLmzl>

¹⁵ RFA-Burmese, 11 Oct 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/rfaburmese/posts/pfbid0Lbu5SuDy3ERWWhe88utfzYMWt8W8btNvRXck66pNBy2bR7VZvwDumiJPZHDagxJ7l>

such suffered the burning down of villages and lost 58,397 houses, followed by 11,504 in Magway Region, 1,638 in Chin State, and other states and regions faced a similar terrible situation.¹⁶

4

IDP Situation

The figure of IDPs surged dramatically, totalling 2 million amidst the ongoing conflict throughout the country. In northern Shan State, “Operation 1027” conducted by the Three Brotherhood Alliance alone which comprises the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance (MNDA), the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Arakan Army (AA), led to the displacement of 20,000 people within five days alarming urgent needs of humanitarian aid of basic items like food and clothing.¹⁷ Furthermore, residents of Lautkai who fled the conflict to the China-Myanmar border were met with tear gas deployed by Chinese border authorities. The conflict in Lautkai resulted in 16 deaths, including women and children, in northern Shan State. Those affected by the ongoing battles in the region are now in dire need of urgent assistance.¹⁸

On 21 November 2023, approximately 30,000 villagers from Kin Ywar village in eastern Mattaya in Mandalay region became IDPs as they fled from the fighting in the area.¹⁹ On 4 November, in the southern areas of Monywa, Sagaing Region, the terrorist military fired heavy artillery forcing around 10,000 individuals into displacement and requiring urgent assistance.²⁰ Additionally, on 13 November, ongoing battles between the terrorist military and the AA in Rakhine led to the displacement of over 2,000 villagers from Chain Khar Li and Done Paik villages in Rathedaung township and they struggled with food shortages. Notably, a majority of those affected were reported to be women and children.²¹

¹⁶ Data For Myanmar, 8 Nov 2023

https://web.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=786706563469331&id=100063899833953&mibextid=cr9u03&paipv=0&eav=AfalRi_On6PiPfuHU8LS0uWCMtRp7_bwW5_82N7G-slrCsegsKKYxRjFMp_XzI9G_Ng&_rdc=1&_rdr

¹⁷ The Irrawaddy Burmese Edition, 5 Nov 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/theirrawaddyburmese/posts/pfbid0kYWsgHFsFHcaC9TuL9qtV4uVVAYaXAfadogYp4NpE8T9dGnrZ6TgWDSn4tVKK9NHI>

¹⁸ Ayeayawaddy Times, 28 Nov 2023

<https://web.facebook.com/ayeayawaddytimes/posts/pfbid09FvDsX7H5MXZ66mJq4cEbvmtDjibPXNG2e6b53tzY4oZsgXTDko94EvS3f2rhJW9I>

¹⁹ Maye Latt Athan, 22 Nov 2023

<https://web.facebook.com/myaelattathan/posts/pfbid02oVzMSu6Pk3aRkjSWJt1E1kJJMvneNxcHFGHCvHG4WmJyD3z6c9jXHEiK5RZ5eGJmI>

²⁰ Towards, 6 Nov 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/SithoTowardsMedia/posts/pfbid02rYttoE1s9yzTGM6rpGdtgW6u9R9gVc9vEK8HpBhNhNgwAMASYQMP3LnDUXCupL3Wl>

²¹ Western News, 13 Nov 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/westernnewsagency/posts/pfbid0MGnzFzDZSYxRRoQ951o9T15TLdaHAsVAbgUYUnP4GRuASUR2wCUnCmM8qRaX98Pl>

Almost all IDP camps are in desperate need of warm clothing and blankets as it is winter in those conflict-affected areas. Starting in November 2023, IDP camps in Rakhine State faced severe cold weather, the suffering further exacerbated by the Mocha Storm as they lost their belongings, including blankets, warm clothes, mosquito nets, mats, and other essential items. Children and the elderly are the most severely affected by the shortage of blankets.²²

In IDP camps, the availability of primary healthcare services was minimal. As a result, women residing in these camps encounter difficulties in accessing essential items like women's sanitary packs and underwear.

In Karenni State, the intense battles between the terrorist military and revolutionary forces, coupled with daily military raids, posed significant challenges in transporting medicine to the IDP camps. Consequently, children under five years old in the IDP camps had no access to necessary vaccinations.²³

Therefore, the IDP camps relied heavily and primarily on humanitarian assistance, but the ongoing battles made transporting these items to those in need difficult. Thus, many aid organizations preferred to transfer money rather than directly transport goods. However, high service fees for transfer calculated by percentage to withdraw cash meant that those donations were insufficient to buy necessary items for the IDPs.

²² Narinjara, 2 Nov 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/pfbid02ufxzvV1JER8dmEF1CU9s9CQ47X4LmGRGFhLP7h7hPNnVMvGEh7XJyH3gZfSUS7mhl>

²³ Kantarawaddy Times, 13 Nov 2023

<https://www.facebook.com/KantarawaddyTimes/posts/pfbid023UYGprUvaYsD4bWZus8yagXSHYTDqncdHjGswt65TB7oz7ZUsHMyN1WDKdQieMxl>

5 Analysis

Throughout 2023, instances of violence against women continued across the country in various forms. What is particularly alarming was that the perpetrators were not just isolated to the terrorist military but also from the revolutionary forces as well as civilians. It underscored the entrenched nature of patriarchal beliefs within our society. In such a society deeply entrenched in particular beliefs, those in positions of authority often perpetrate acts of violence, employing force against individuals who may appear vulnerable in terms of power and strength. As such, women and girls, in particular, bear the brunt of oppression, violence, and discrimination perpetrated by those in positions of power. To fight against patriarchy, both women and all members of society must shoulder the responsibility for change.

The protection of women by law was despondent under the terrorist military since they constantly inflicted lawless violence against the people and the rule of law was non-existence in the country. Furthermore, women who were the survivors of violence faced significant barriers to accessing essential humanitarian assistance and services. The military's imposition of oppressive measures, combined with transportation restrictions, created challenging barriers for victims and survivors to obtain the necessary support and humanitarian aid.

Throughout 2023, the terrorist military committed a variety of HRVs, including extrajudicial killings, airstrikes, and house and village burnings, all of which constituted widespread crimes against humanity and war crimes. These crimes were committed openly and on purpose. In the later months of 2023, the military strategically implemented internet and phone line shutdowns, a signature tactic used by the previous successive military regimes, namely the 'Four Cuts' strategy - cutting off food sources, funds, information, and recruits against any armed opposition. Documenting HRVs committed by the military became challenging as a result of these shutdowns. Additionally, the lack of internet and phone access raised concerns about the potential increase in more HRVs in these areas, where the military has historically used and taken advantage of during the time lacking communication channels to carry out attacks against civilians.

The terrorist military attempted to suppress revolutionary and resistance forces in various ways to legitimize its coup. However, whether the military's attempted coup had been successful or not was highly contentious as revolutionary forces were gaining ground. Based on the current situation since October 2023, the military will face significant hurdles in effectively controlling territories over an extended period since 1 February 2021 due to the coordinated offensive attacks by revolutionary forces.

In summary, 2023 was the most challenging year for the citizens of Myanmar as they struggled with various hardships to survive. We analyzed there is a potential for increased HRVs against its citizens as a result of collaborative and coordinated efforts conducted by the revolutionary actors and forces. This combined with losses and casualties that the military suffered, and there is also a possibility of calls for negotiations from the military to dismantle or weaken the resistance forces.