

# Burma

JUNE - AUGUST BRIEFING 2018



## Humanitarian Figures:

**237,000**

people currently live in camps for internally displaced people

**106,000**

internally displaced people in Kachin and northern Shan states due to ongoing conflict

**40%**

of the displaced are still located in areas beyond Government control

**153,000**

Affected by flooding and landslides

**863,000**

people in need of aid

**5%**

of 562 humanitarian aid applications for travel authorization to government-controlled areas

## Highlights:

- > Military aggression against the Kachin has escalated since the beginning of June.
- > Peace talks continue amidst ongoing clashes between ethnic armies and the Tatmadaw.
- > Monsoon season has caused thousands to be displaced nationwide.
- > A damning UN Report has condemned Aung San Suu Kyi's apparent lack of action in regards to the genocide that the Government army is being accused of.

## Key Developments:

- > The Burmese military [refuses to rescue those displaced in Kachin](#), despite nationwide protests. Churches, monasteries and existing IDP camps are currently housing an additional 7,000 Kachin.
- > The [third round of 21CPC talks](#) commenced in the context of escalating fighting between the Tatmadaw and various Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and the ongoing Rohingya crisis.
- > [Floods and landslides](#) have been reported across Burma because of monsoon season, displacing thousands.
- > A [UN Report](#) into the circumstances of the significant movement of the Rohingya population has called for the investigation of top military commanders in Myanmar, following revelations of brutality and human rights violations on a fact-finding Mission.

## Context

Myanmar (Burma) is a highly ethnically diverse country, consisting of 7 states and headed by de facto leader State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi since free elections in 2015. [Burma's history of British colonisation](#) has had a detrimental effect on internal ethnic divisions, and following independence in 1948 intercultural violence erupted between the national Government army (*Tatmadaw*) and ethnic opposition armies. In the subsequent years, ethnic tensions remained and from 1962 to 2011 Burma was under the rule of a highly repressive [military junta](#).

The majority of Burma's population is of Burman ethnicity (68%), the Shan make up 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4% and Mon 2% ([CIA Factbook 2017](#)). Most of the population identifies as Buddhist (88%). Prevalent in the media is the Rohingya crisis, whereby roughly 900,000 Muslims have fled to Bangladesh since early 2017 following growing attacks by the Government of Myanmar military that claim they are dispelling terrorists, however there is [mounting evidence](#) to suggest that religion plays a significant role and has been deemed as "ethnic cleansing". Less well documented is the persecution of Christians who make up 6.2% of the Burmese population that claim they are being attacked by the junta because of their faith.

There are numerous ethnic armies operating in Burma and regular clashes with the Tatmadaw has displaced thousands of civilians over the decades succeeding the end of British rule.

## EAOs Operating in Burma

- Kachin Independence Army (KIA) was formed by soldiers that defected from the regime army in 1962 to fight for self-determination.
- Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) signed a ceasefire with the Tatmadaw in 2015 however it was violated by the Tatmadaw in 2018, leading to armed clashes.
- Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) has operated in Rakhine state since 2009.
- Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) are a newly formed group who claimed responsibility for the attacks in 2017 that catalysed the ongoing Rohingya crisis.
- Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) is one of the largest insurgent groups in Burma.
- Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) emerged following alliance with the Communist Party of Burma and an internal split in SSA in 1996.
- Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) operates in Tawngpeng, Shan State, aiming for self-determination for the Ta'ang people.
- The Northern Alliance is a military coalition between ALA, KIA, Kokang's Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and TNLA against the Tatmadaw.
- On 1 July 2018, TNLA allied with SSA-N to fight against rival ethnic army SSA-S.



### Map of Burma Administrative Divisions

*HART's partner Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) is located in Shan State, and also provides assistance to displaced populations in Thailand.*

*Health and Hope, run by Dr SaSa is located in Chin State.*

*Doh Say works mainly in Karenni (Kayah) state.*

# Latest Developments

## Internal Political Updates

On 6 June, [the memorandum of understanding was signed](#), promising to create conditions to allow for the return of some of the 700,000 Rohingya who are currently living in Bangladesh.

Despite ongoing peace talks, [armed clashes continue in Kachin state](#) between the Tatmadaw and the KIA, and fighting continues in Northern Shan between the Tatmadaw and the RCSS and TNLA.

Following delays, the Myanmar government opened the third round of key peace talks in mid-July as part of 21CPC ([21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference](#)) in an attempt to bring about lasting peace.

- [The first Panglong Conference was held in 1947](#) between the Shan, Kachin and Chin ethnic minority leaders and Aung San, head of the interim Burmese government, in order to negotiate the future of Burma following independence from the British Empire.
- 21CPC aims to unite representatives of the government, the military, ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), and civil society [in order to establish dialogue to build democracy](#).
- Like the 2017 21CPC, no agreement was reached on security sector issues due to critical differences between the Tatmadaw and the various EAOs, including over a potential federal army.
- Further tensions were aggravated by Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief statement attacking ethnic armed organisations.

As the peace process occurs largely at the top-level, [communities often feel excluded](#) from peace talks, contributing to the inability to foster sustainable peace.

## Disasters

[Due to monsoon season](#), floods and landslides have been reported in 9 out of 14 provinces in Burma.

More than [16,000 people have been displaced by floods](#) in Karen State, according to the state's disaster management department.

[26 July](#) – At least 27 people are feared dead following a landslide at a jade mine in northern Myanmar

## Rakhine/Rohingya

[Over 900,000 Rohingya Muslims remain in Bangladesh](#) due to a brutal army counter-insurgency campaign. Bangladesh has allowed another 11,400 refugees in the months of January-June.

Myanmar leader [Aung San Suu Kyi defended her government's](#) actions in Rakhine State, claiming that terrorist threats are responsible for the crisis and not discrimination.

[Requests for authorisations](#) for staff to visit the conflict area have been delayed and the UN declined an offer from the government to work in limited areas, refusing to send in experts until a better deal has been negotiated.

## Kachin

[As of 31 July](#), there were 140 internally displaced people (IDP) sites in Kachin State, with a total of 96,727 IDPs.

Around [100,000 people have been living in displacement camps](#) in Kachin and northern Shan States. Nearly half of them are living in areas outside of government control and have been cut off from direct international aid since May 2016.

The Tatmadaw [threatened members of the Kachin Baptist Convention](#) with legal action if they continue to supply aid and meet IDPs in areas outside of government control as they are accused of assisting the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

[A Sky News investigation](#) into genocidal campaign on Kachin Christian minority in Myanmar suggested that the attacks on the Kachin by the Myanmar military is increasing in severity as the military persecution of the Rohingya went unpunished.

## Northern Shan

[As of 31 July](#), there were 32 internally IDP sites in Shan State, with a total of 8,815 IDPs.

[10/11 July](#) – More than 450 ethnic Shan have been displaced from five villages in Mong Kung Township, Shan State, by three days of fighting between the Tatmadaw and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS)/ Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) troops, according to local sources

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the SSA-S [clashed seven times](#) in July of this year.

- Over 2 weeks 2,800 people have been newly displaced by fighting in Shan State.

The Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP) joined forces with the TNLA for [an offensive against RCSS](#) as they accuse them on encroaching on their territory.

According to the TNLA, government forces took six female [medics as prisoners of war](#) as they were travelling to the northern region, killing a TNLA soldier attempting to protect them. It is believed that they were later killed in captivity.

## International Response

A [United Nations report](#) in August called for the investigation of Burma's top military generals for genocide.

- Aung San Suu Kyi was accused of failing to prevent violence against the Rohingya minority
- The report found that mass atrocity crimes have been committed against populations in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan states in Myanmar
- So-called 'clearance operations' against the Rohingya have also been evidenced in the report

A new [68-page Fortify Rights report](#) released at the end of August revealed that Beijing communicated with the Government of Myanmar and non-ethnic state armies to prevent U.N or international aid near the border shared with Kachin State.

The [US Treasury Department announced economic sanctions](#) imposed on Burmese security forces for their role in "ethnic cleansing" against Rohingya Muslims and human rights abuses against other ethnic minority groups.

[Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson spoke](#) to Aung San Suu Kyi about the welfare of the Rohingya and the recent violence in Kachin and Shan States, emphasising the need for humanitarian access for those displaced by violence.