

BURMA

SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER BRIEFING 2018



Humanitarian Figures

862,900

Estimated people in need of Humanitarian Assistance in Burma, according to [UN November reports](#)

106,900

Estimated Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Kachin and northern Shan States, according to [OCHA](#)

128,200

Estimated Internally Displaced Persons in Rakhine IDP camps, according to latest [UN figures](#)

727,000

Estimated people displaced from Burma to Bangladesh since August 2018, the [ISCG reports](#)

128,000

Muslims, [95% of whom](#) are stateless Rohingya, remain in camps more than six years after violence broke out in Rakhine State

286,000

People in disaster-prone Burma were temporarily displaced by [monsoon seasonal floods](#) in 2018

Highlights

- > US, UK and United Nations warn against the Rohingya repatriation plan
- > Christians are under scrutiny as the persecution of religious minorities continues
- > EU commits [\\$13.7 million](#) to expand peace program in Shan and Kachin States
- > The global community calls for justice in wake of damning UN genocide report

Key Developments

- > The British Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has [condemned a new low for press freedom](#) in Burma, adding to his protest of a long series of human rights abuses committed by Burmese authorities. “Imprisoning journalists who write about inconvenient truths is an unconscionable blow to everyone’s freedom” Hunt stated on his September visit to Burma.
- > A regional army in the Burmese State of Wa has expelled eight Catholic clergy from Shan State. In October, reports emerged of [approximately one hundred Christians](#) who were forced to sign pledges that they would only pray in private. Religious leaders in the region reported that [41 bible students](#) had been forcibly recruited into the United Wa State Army.
- > In November, clashes broke out between the two armed forces operating in Shan state, where three civilians were killed and two wounded. A [400-strong](#) Ta’ang National Liberation Army and Shan State Progress Party co-operative also attacked the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army outpost at Nagar mountain, according to Taifreedom news.

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](#).

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.

Ethnic Arms Operations (EAOs) Active 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 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.



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

Concerns for Christians as Burma Brutalises Minorities

Aggression is escalating against Christians in Shan State as a crackdown on religious freedoms is ordered by the United Wa State Army (UWSA). The campaign has seen the destruction of [“illegally-constructed”](#) churches, and the closure of [52 others](#). Amid the expulsion of clergymen, nuns and teachers, and the forced recruitment of young Christians into the USWA, [“the scale, suddenness and severity”](#) of the situation is profoundly concerning, according to CSW East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers, who added that Chinese authorities appear to be driving the acts of repression and persecution against Christians.

EU Pledges \$13.7 Million to Fund Peace and Development

In November, the EU committed to the second phase of its Durable Peace Program in Kachin State, and is expanding its reach to northern Shan State. EU Ambassador Kristian Schmidt has said the need to foster peace is “particularly urgent” for ethnic communities, where more than [107,000 displaced people](#) from both Kachin and Shan states have taken refuge in 170 camps, according to UN figures. With the EU’s continued support, NGOs will be able to expand their services to support IDPs: [Schmidt claims](#) the program “has done a great job in raising awareness among displaced communities on their stake in the peace process”.

ICC Holds Power to Prosecute for Genocide Crimes

In September, a decision made by the International Criminal Court will allow prosecutors to apply a “full-blown” investigation into the actions of the Burmese military. The ICC ruled that it can prosecute for crimes committed against Rohingya Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities, stating that even though Myanmar is not a signatory to the Court, Burmese military leaders can still be held responsible for crimes of deportation, “the forcible transfer of a population”, opening investigation into other genocidal crimes, including persecution.

Concerns Shared Over Repatriation of Minorities to Burma

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister issued a statement on the repatriation of Rohingya, calling on governments of Bangladesh and Burma to uphold principles of [voluntary, safe and dignified return](#). Mark Field claims “violence and impunity persist” while the conditions placed on Burmese authorities are yet to be met. Field has urged safeguards to be put in place to ensure safe freedom of movement, equal rights and citizenship for refugees returning to Burma.

UN Demands Justice over Genocide Ruling

International outcry calls for the atrocities committed under the Burmese military to be brought before the ICC. An extensive list of crimes and human rights violations were cited under genocide in a United Nations report released in August, and a [UN General Assembly was held in late September](#) to discuss how perpetrators of genocide can be held responsible. “We need to act in concert with other countries, it is incredibly important to all of us that

those perpetrators face justice” [states UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt](#). “Without that there can be no solution to the huge refugee problem.”

Timeline

September

[ICC claims it can prosecute Burmese military officials for deportation crimes](#)

[United Nations General Assembly held on Burma genocide ruling](#)

October

[Christians under scrutiny as communities in Shan State are persecuted](#)

November

[EU pledges to fund Peace Program in Kachin and Shan States](#)

[FCO Minister issues statement on repatriation of minorities to Burma](#)

[Inter-ethnic conflict in Shan State is reported as clashes erupt in region](#)