



MYANMAR: ESCALATION OF CONFLICT IN RAKHINE AND SOUTHERN CHIN

Flash Update

As of 5 September 2022

Highlights

- Rising tensions between the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) and the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine and southern Chin since June have led to frequent armed clashes, including the use of heavy weapons and airstrikes. The renewed conflict follows a temporary ceasefire between the AA-MAF, which had been in place since November 2020.
- Most of the fighting has been reported in Maungdaw, Rathedaung, Buthidaung, and Mrauk-U townships in Rakhine State and in Paletwa township in Chin State.
- As of 5 September, almost 9,600 people have consequently been displaced, bringing the total number of internally displaced people (IDPs) from past and present AA-MAF fighting across Rakhine and Paletwa township in Chin State to nearly 84,000, according to UN latest figures.
- Key roads and waterways have been blocked, restricting the movement of civilians and preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching people in need.
- Local and international partners have been providing emergency assistance to affected people where access is permitted but many areas remain unreachable. Humanitarians need unimpeded access to affected areas and the removal of bureaucratic obstructions to allow for the delivery of timely, life-saving support to people in need.
- Funding is urgently needed to replenish depleted supplies and address expected shortages, especially in food assistance, water and sanitation services, shelter and non-food items (NFIs) and health services for IDPs and other affected communities. Pre-positioning of stocks is critical given the escalation of clashes and movement restrictions on humanitarian actors.

Situation Overview:

Over the past month, the security and humanitarian situations have significantly deteriorated in several townships in Rakhine State and in Paletwa township in southern Chin due to an escalation in fighting between the MAF and the AA. This has prompted fresh displacement and further limited the movement of people and humanitarian actors in the area. People are also starting to move from rural to urban areas, expecting clashes to intensify. Some have already been displaced into the capital, Sittwe. In particular, the non-displaced Rohingya population, who are already limited in their freedom of movement and lack support networks in urban areas, are at risk of further confinement in their villages.

Since the beginning of August 2022, intense fighting, shelling, and deployment of troops have been reported, including in the south of Paletwa town, near the Kaladan river and the Kyauktaw-Samee-Paletwa Road. In northern Rakhine, a series of clashes has been reported in Maungdaw, Rathedaung and Buthidaung townships. According to partners, the first airstrike in Rakhine since the temporary ceasefire of November 2020 was reported in northern Maungdaw in late August. In central Rakhine, armed clashes were also reported in Mrauk-U township and have extended for the first time to southern Rakhine in Taungup township. There were no reports of displacement thus far from this latter clash.

Of greatest concern is the situation in Mrauk-U township in central Rakhine, in Maungdaw, Rathedaung and Buthidaung townships in northern Rakhine and in Paletwa township in Chin. In Mrauk-U township,

armed clashes started on 28 August. Consequently, hundreds of families from six villages¹ were forced to flee their homes and seek safety in nearby villages, in existing displacement sites or a newly established displacement site in Warzi monastery, or with relatives. Some troops have reportedly entered villages and monasteries, and surrounded the market in Mrauk-U, forcing residents to flee. The market was consequently closed amid fears that clashes could resume in the area.

In Paletwa township, armed clashes took place in Rimawa and Ah Baung Thar villages on 20 August, displacing some 183 households: 85 households (360 people), who sought refuge in the cyclone shelters in Paletwa township, while 98 households (36 households from Ah Baung Thar and 62 households from Rimawa village) moved to stay with their relatives in Paletwa town.

In northern Rakhine, following the clashes on 13 August in Done Paik Village Tract in Rathedaung south, almost half of those initially displaced have reportedly returned to their homes. As of 31 August, some 172 households (almost 540 people) remain displaced in Rathedaung south. Due to ongoing insecurity, some residents who had returned home are going back to displacement sites for safety. Food assistance was distributed to these IDPs through local partners. In Rathedaung north, clashes on 30 August in Pyine Taw Village Tract forced residents to flee to the western part of the May Yu riverbank. An estimated 360 households (almost 1,300 people) from 7 village tracts were displaced to Rathedaung downtown. Members of the Maungdaw Inter-Agency Group (MIAG) are planning to distribute dignity kits for these IDPs. In Maungdaw north, clashes on 27 August, near Kha Maung Seik, displaced around 336 households (almost 1,200 people) to safer nearby locations. Some of the IDPs are seeking safety in Maungdaw downtown. On 3 September, clashes reportedly took place in Hpa Yon Chaung Village Tract in Buthidaung township, resulting in the displacement of an estimated 140 households (more than 700 people) within the township.

Security measures have been tightened in many areas across the state, waterways and roads have been blocked in northern Rakhine, while transportation of medical supplies and food has been restricted into Paletwa. Since mid-August, a travel ban has been imposed by the de facto authorities on the Ah Ngu Maw-Maungdaw Road - the main road linking the northern townships with Sittwe. The waterway along the Kaladan river, which is the only route to transport supplies to Paletwa in Chin State, is only available for use by ships of the de facto authorities. Restrictions on the Maungdaw-Kyein Chaung-Kha Maung Sein-Taung Pyo Road are still in place. In addition, Rakhine residents along the Ah Ngu Maw- Maungdaw Road and residents from four Rohingya village tracts² have reportedly been prohibited from leaving their villages. In case of medical emergencies, residents were instructed to apply for approval from the commander of the Border Guard Police (BGP), which requires interventions of the respective village administrators. These restrictions have also obstructed the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need. Since July, the AA-United League of Arakan (ULA) has also tried to impose additional restrictions, requiring operational partners to obtain approval from its Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office (HDCO) to deliver assistance to affected people, most notably in Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships, and to some extent in Minbya, Mrauk-U, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw and Myebon townships.

As of 5 September, it is estimated that 2,270 households (almost 9,600 people) have been displaced within Rakhine and Paletwa township due to the recent armed clashes, the blockage of main roads and transportation routes, and food shortages in their areas. This brings the total number of IDPs from past (2018-2020) and present AA-MAF conflict across Rakhine State and Paletwa township of Chin to almost 84,000 people.

¹ Let Kar, Bu Ywet Ma Nyoe, Hpa Yar Gyi, Pauk Taw Pyin, Way Thar Li, and Auk Thar Kan villages.

² Pan Taw Pyin, Nyaung Chaung, Du Nyaung Pin Gyi and Pa Din.

Area	Township	New Displaced Households	New IDPs Number
Rakhine	Buthidaung	140	705
	Kyauktaw	54	223
	Maungdaw	336	1,151
	Mrauk-U	993	4,712
	Rathedaung south	172	539
	Rathedaung north	360	1,292
	Sittwe	7	24
Chin State	Paletwa township	208	926
Total		2,270	9,572

Humanitarian needs and response:

Humanitarian organizations have immediately started responding to emerging needs where access is possible, providing emergency assistance, including food, shelter and other relief items.

Rakhine:

- In Rathedaung south, local partners provided food assistance to new IDPs who are currently sheltering in displacement sites, as international partners have not had access to these locations.
- In Buthidaung township, an international NGO, together with other partners, has been distributing basic items, including dignity kits, to the new IDPs where access is possible.
- In Mrauk-U township the following assistance has been provided:
 - Local communities have been providing cash and rice to the new IDPs.
 - First Line Emergency Response (FLER) implementers provided food assistance for 7 days and other relief items to 191 households (more than 700 people) that are hosted in the newly established displacement site in Warzi monastery, while an INGO provided them with hygiene kits and kitchen sets.
 - International and national NGOs, in coordination with the UN, are planning to provide shelter items this week to the 528 newly displaced households who are currently sheltering in 11 displacement sites.
 - Humanitarian focal agencies in displacement sites have been distributing NFIs to new IDPs who arrived on 3 September, to those sheltering in the existing 11 displacement sites, and additional assistance will be provided.
- In Kyauktaw township, an INGO in coordination with the CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster, distributed NFIs to 48 households who arrived from Paletwa to the existing 3 displacement sites on 3 September. Shelter assistance will be provided shortly. The UN plans to provide full shelter kits and supplies for the establishment of kitchens including bamboo, tarps, and timber. The UN also intends to provide cash to these displaced households after verification.

Paletwa township, Chin:

- On 26 August, MRCS distributed family kits, hygiene kits, shelter tool kits and mosquito nets to new IDPs while the Township IDP Response Committee distributed rice for seven days.
- On 1 September, the township IDP Response Committee distributed rice for 2 days to 85 families, who have been sheltering in the cyclone shelter in Paletwa since 28 August.

Gaps and challenges:

- Humanitarian partners are facing significant challenges in accessing affected people, in northern Rakhine and Paletwa township due to the shutdown of key roads and transport routes, and in central Rakhine due to delays in getting through the checkpoints (on average wait times are 2-3 hours daily).

- Additional funding is required to address expected shortages in contingency supplies, especially for food, shelter, water and sanitation, health and other relief items.
- Humanitarian actors are currently exploring ways to respond to any potential needs that emerge in southern Rakhine, in case future clashes result in displacement.
- Explosive ordnance risks remain a critical concern since the resumption of the clashes. This will require concerted efforts and funds to create awareness through explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) amongst the displaced population, host communities and humanitarian responders.

*** Information in this update is based on inputs from humanitarian partners in central and northern Rakhine (MIAG)*

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