

MONTHLY OVERVIEW

Human Rights Situation in Mon State, Karen State & Tanintharyi Region

MARCH
2023



The Military Junta Continues to Use Gendered Violence as a Tool to Suppress Dissent and Exploit Fear into Young Women and Children

MARCH 2023

International Women’s Day was recognized on 8 March. In Burma, women face ongoing threats to their lives as the Burma Army increases its armed presence in civilian areas. While women human rights defenders were bravely spreading awareness and solidarity about the importance of 8 March, the regime continued to oppress women violently. Many of those detained this month are women and young girls who have been abducted on baseless charges. Following a series of arrests on 7 March that included women, all were accused of supporting the armed resistance movement: “Everyone knows that they are innocent,” said a local villager.

In addition, as of 9 March 2023 to date, at least eleven local civilians, including two young women, were arbitrarily abducted by the junta forces and the secret police in Yebyu Township, Dawei. According to friends close to them, all of them were detained and violently questioned in detention centers.

In a related but separate incident on 9 March, the junta forces arrested two young women near Kalein Aung Town, Yebyu Township, Dawei District, in the Tenasserim Division, and sent them to the interrogation center. The two women, 17-year-old Ma Kay

Thi Thi Lin from Zin Bar village and 18-year-old Ma Thet Myat Noe from Kyauk Shut (Nwe Le) village went to Kalein Aung Town by motorbike to buy mobile phones. The junta soldiers arrested them near a bridge on their way back. Residents told HURFOM that since the women were arrested, there has been no contact with them.

“The two arrested girls are just ordinary civilians. Their families don’t have any contact with political or revolutionary groups. Some villagers said Ma Thet Myat Noe’s boyfriend might be a People’s Defense Forces member. The junta is using unproven allegations as the basis for arrest.”

According to local sources, the women were first detained at the Kalein Aung Police Station and then transferred to the interrogation center at the 410 Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) on March 10, 2023.

Since the failed coup on 1 February 2021, HURFOM has documented the murders of over 65 women, 190 injuries and 700 arbitrary arrests. In addition, out of 125 total enforced disappearances since the coup in Southeastern Burma, 30 have been women in HURFOM target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region.

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Gendered violence persists across the country. Women face ongoing risks as the military junta increases its presence, particularly in areas like Karen State, where opposition to the Burma Army has been fierce and unrelenting. Gendered violence is both targeted and indiscriminate. At the beginning of the year, on 1 January 2023, the junta forces patrolling a local area in Mon State shot two young women riding a motorcycle in the back. The two victims were both severely injured.

Further, indiscriminate firing is increasingly targeting local women and children. As many men have fled for fear of forced recruitment or to join allied opposition movements, families have become displaced as their temporary homes are struck and targeted by the Burma Army. On March 8, 2023, at 7:30 PM, the junta's Infantry Battalion IB No. 24 indiscriminately fired artillery shells from their army camp base near Thaton, based in Kyone Mein Village, Thaton, Mon State. The attack killed two children and seriously injured two local villagers. The recent artillery mortars wounded a child, and a woman was taken to the Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade No.1 frontline clinic for first-aid and treatment.

Since 14 March 2023, one child has been injured, and more than 1,000 residents have fled their homes due to the junta's indiscriminate artillery weapons and drone

attacks on the Moan Township, Nyaung-Lay-Bin District. The KNU's Administrative Office also confirmed the incidents.

Network reporters reported that an innocent 6-year-old boy from Shwe Yaung Pya village died after being hit in the head by artillery mortars that were shot indiscriminately by the Junta's No. 314 Artillery Regiment Command base in Zee-Won village, Bilin, Mon State:

"The boy came to this area with his parents to fish from the lake. On March 18, at 3:30 p.m., Bilin-based AR No. 314 opened fire with artillery weapons in the village. A shell hit Saw Phoe Thagyan. The young boy was killed instantly," said a witness to the tragic event.

The numbers of those displaced in HURFOM areas grew steadily this month due to the regime's worsening offensives. On March 4, 2023, around 9 AM, the joint forces of the junta and their alliance armed members, and an estimated 50 members, entered Ought-Kyauk-Wut village, Long Lon township, Dawei, and killed six villagers for no reason. According to the network reporters, these joint forces also burned down four houses belonging to Ought-Kyauk-Wut villagers.

In addition, there have been continued reports of the arrest and detention of innocent civilians in Tanintharyi, southern

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Burma. HURFOM confirmed that seventeen individuals with no ties with the Spring Revolution or People's Defense Forces (PDFs) had been arbitrarily arrested while travelling, during midnight raids and at security toll gates.

On February 28, 2023, locals reported that about twelve civilians were abducted after military troops and police raided their homes in Chaung Gyi, Chaung Nge, and Lae Taung War Wards, Tanintharyi Town. "They just knocked on each door and grabbed the people n their lists. My cousin, a 34-year-old female shop owner, was also abducted from her house," said a family member of one of the detainees," said a resident.

The ongoing accusations by the junta of people harbouring opposition soldiers or supporting the resistance movement in various ways have led to widespread fear. Junta security forces, the General Administration Department, and police reportedly detained around nineteen local villagers for interrogation from February 26 to 28. They were all permitting soldiers of the PDFs to live in the local plantations.

Most of those detainees were taken into military custody in Palaw township, Southern Tanintharyi Region; however, the network reporters are still unable to identify the identities and numbers of detainees still

in detention. Last year on February 24, the junta forces entered Shut Pon village, Palaw Township. They arrested two PDF members hiding in a monastery. Later on, a Senior Monk of that Monastery was also arrested.

In addition, the brutalities escalating inside the junta's prisons exacerbate the impunity beyond the battlefields. According to the sources close to the prison, the political prisoners in Kyaikmayaw Prison have been brutally oppressed and continue to endure harsh conditions in jail. In some cases, the junta's prison authorities threatened to shoot, beat, and transfer them:

"All the political prisoners in Kyaikmayaw Prison, Mon State, are activists who opposed the cup and related movements. The living conditions are even worse than convicted criminals. The prison staff beat political prisoners who complained about the tightened food budgets, policy decisions and inadequate facilities. At least 50 to 70 were transferred to Thaton township at that time," said an ex-prisoner released in late February 2023.

The prisoners detained under Section 505a usually faced more brutal oppression even though they kept quiet about living and health care problems to the prison authorities.

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“In February 2022, four 505a prisoners from Bago were taken out of the cell at night by the prison staff, forced to sit down, severely beaten with rubber sticks, and threatened to be shot,” said another ex-prisoner.

Lastly, the junta’s unjust and unlawful deployment of Martial Law across the region undermines civilian safety. On February 2, 2023, the regime imposed martial law in 37 townships across Burma. HURFOM targeted documentation areas, including Ye Township in Mon State and Kawkareik and Kyarinnseikyi Townships, in Karen State, are included in the list and are inhabited mainly by Karen and Mon.

The junta has also deployed military personnel to the townships and tightened the security at the town’s checkpoints. They also imposed a curfew, preventing residents from going outside between 6 PM and 6 AM.

“Martial law and the curfew cause health, economic and social inconveniences. We’ve heard that the junta will also limit

motorbike riding,” said a resident from Ye Township.

Within a month of martial law being imposed, at least ten people from Kawkareik Township and nearly twenty-five from Kyarinnseikyi Township were arrested for breaching curfew.

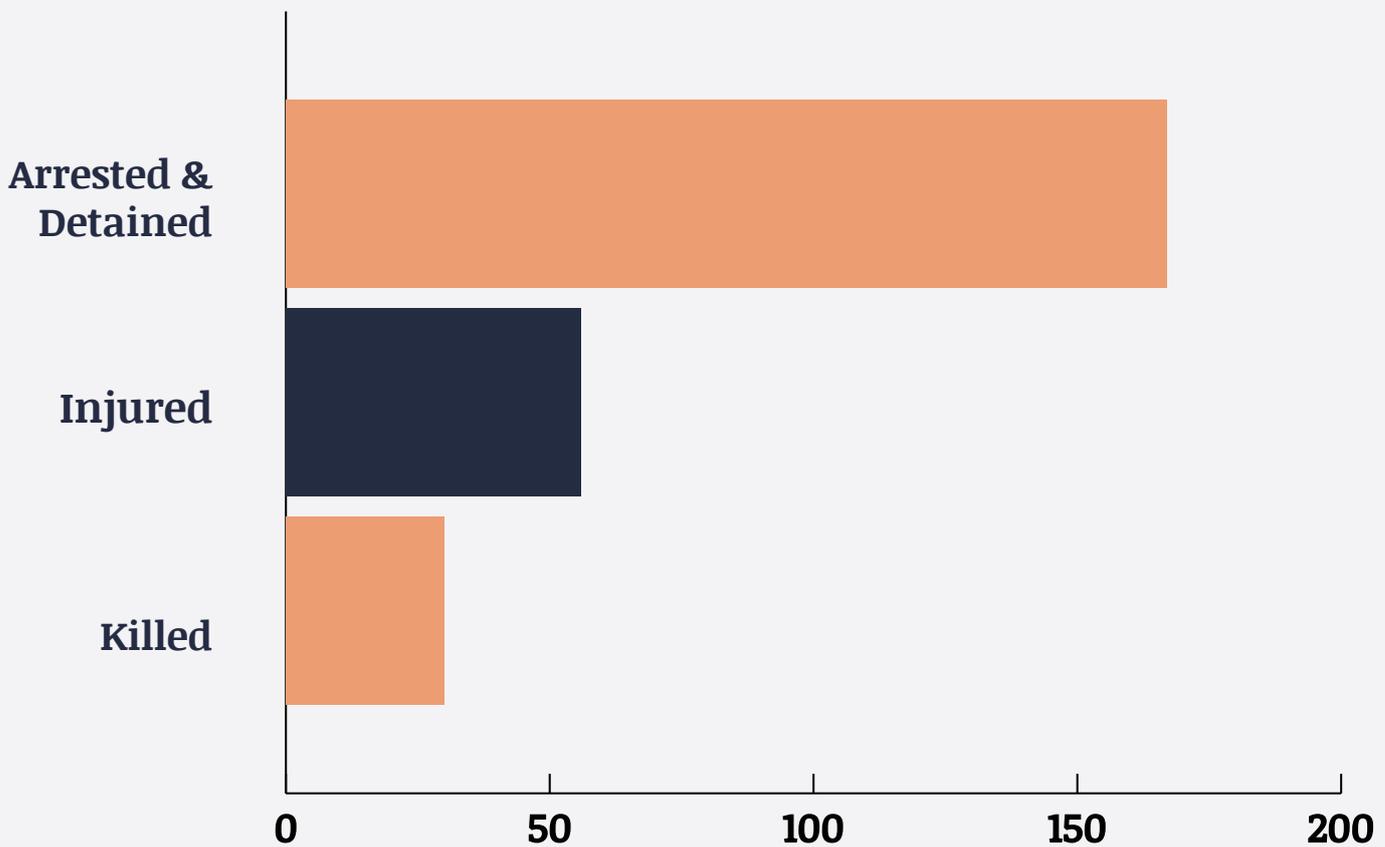
“At about 5 PM, I must close my shop in advance. Tea shops, fried rice shops, betel nut shops and other restaurants that run at night must be closed.”

The junta’s ongoing injustices speak to the lack of accountability. While condemning the brutalities, regional and international actors have failed to adequately take steps that set a precedent that the regime is not above the law - domestically or internationally.

SCALED UP HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

HURFOM fieldworkers continue to take great risks to document the human rights violations being perpetrated in target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region. By the end of **March 2023**, HURFOM recorded **least 104 arrested, 63 detained, 56 injured and 30 killed**.

Civilians Arrested, Injured & Killed in March 2023 in Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi region



4+

Pro-Democracy Activists Targeted by the Junta

11

PROTESTS ACROSS TARGET
AREAS IN MARCH 2023

8

TANINTHARYI
REGION

2

MON STATE

1

KAREN STATE



13,000+

CIVILIANS DISPLACED ACROSS TARGET AREAS

CIVILIANS TARGETED IN MON, KAREN STATE
& TANINTHARYI REGION

6+

DISMISSED FOR
INVOLVEMENT
IN THE CIVIL
DISOBEDIENCE
MOVEMENT

4+

PROTESTERS/
ACTIVISTS
SENTENCED IN
JUNTA COURTS

8+

ENFORCED
DISAPPEARANCES
BY THE MILITARY



KAREN STATE

4,000+ Newly Displaced

18 Injured, 8 Killed



Mon State



Tanintharyi Region

Civilians in Karen State continued to be bombarded by the junta's violence. Civilians are routinely being forced to flee to different locations to seek safety and protection from the onslaught of unprovoked attacks by the Burma Army.

On 17 March 2023, at about 4:30 AM, there was a clash between the junta and the Karen National Liberation Army and their alliances' armed forces between Htwa-Nee-Gone Village and Sae-Palae Village. Then, the junta forces indiscriminately fired at least 40 mortars into those two villages.

Witnesses recalled at least eight homes destroyed in the attack. Afterwards, no one dared to go back to the village. Many could not even carry their belongings or livestock that they were forced to flee with.

Only a day later, on 18 March, the military troops fired four artillery weapons and three drone attacks on the Yae-Le monastery, causing damage. Due to the attack, at least 1162 people abandoned their homes and ran. Every time they escape and seek shelter, the need for food and shelter becomes even more significant.

Junta forces used airstrikes and artillery shells again in the fighting with armed resistance forces. Because of these attacks, more than 800 families fled their homes in five villages in Kyainnseikyi township, Karen State.



MON STATE

2,000+ Newly Displaced

14 Injured, 9 Killed



Karen State



Tanintharyi Region

In Mon State's capital city of Mawlamyine, families have told HURFOM that they are becoming increasingly concerned with the threat of forced recruitment. The parents and families claim that the Junta Council operating under the Southeast Command, based in Mawlamyine, has been forcibly conducting recruitment for their Army from Mon Townships, such as Mudon and Thanbyuzayat, to fight against local anti-junta resistance forces.

Due to the junta's targeting of youth, many people have left their homes to seek refuge in neighbouring countries where they face additional risks as undocumented migrant workers, according to a source from Social Service Group in the eastern Thai-Burma area.

“The leading cause for the boost in young people leaving to work in Thailand and Malaysia is the junta's escalation of human rights abuses in their original places and forced recruitment targeting them. When we asked the young people who came here, they said they went abroad to work because they feared being forced to serve under the junta,” a 30-year-old social worker in Three Pagodas Pass said.

In addition to forced recruitment by the junta, military-backed police and the General Administrative Department also persuaded the young people through money and other benefits to joining the army.

“Those who believe in paying hundreds of thousands of cash to become soldiers are more likely to become soldiers. As far as I heard, hundreds of soldiers from Mon State were appointed by the junta,” a source from Thanbyuzayat said.

“I heard the battalion commander who is recruiting soldiers in Infantry Battalion 61 that if the youths in Thanbyuzayat Township decide to serve as a private, depending on the person, they will immediately pay 30 to 50 lakh. However, in reality, the salary is much lower.”

Martial law also poses an ongoing threat to civilians in Mon State. On February 14, 2023, the Junta Light Infantry Battalion LIB 106 arrested Nai Tint Wai, owner of ‘the Yadanar Men Gas Station’ in Mawkanin village, Ye Township, in Mon State. On February 27, the detainee was transferred to the MOMC 19th Light based in Ye township, Mon State. He has not

been allowed to meet with his family members.

“We don’t know why he was arrested. His family members have sent food to him but have no chance to meet with him. We don’t know anything about his situation,” said a villager close to the detainee’s family.

Nai Kyaw Oo, a friend close to the detainee’s family, was also arrested by the 106th LIB on February 7 but released on February 25. Since the junta imposed martial law and a curfew (6 PM to 6 AM) throughout Ye Township, more innocent villagers have been killed and arrested.

HURFOM reporters documented that two innocent local civilians were killed and another two villagers were seriously injured because the Junta forces intentionally fired indiscriminately into the villages in Kyaijkhto Township, Mon State.

On March 21, two civilians, U Kalar and U Aung Lwin, were killed. In addition, two others, Daw Po and a five-year-old boy, were injured due to the intentional firing of artillery shells into the village by Light Infantry Battalion No. 207 and AR No. 310 of the military council stationed in Kyaikhto township.

The perpetrators of these battalions operate under the notorious military division No. 44, based in Zee-Pyaung village. A total of four 120 mm weapons and 105 mm artillery mortars were fired

into Zee-Pyaung village.

As the armed conflicts in Mon State escalate, the threat of landmines is also the most dangerous hazard to the local villager in Mon State. Landmines have resulted in injuries and amputations, and death in some cases. The worst threat to the livelihood of residents is their access to their livelihoods and food. On 24 March 2023, a young man named Ko Khin Zaw Htwe, age 25, died of injuries while looking for vegetables in the forest near Waitzar Taung, Kyaikhto township, Mon State. His right leg was severed, and he bled to death.

In September 2022, two men were also hit by landmines near Chaung Kwai Village and Saung-Naing-Gyi villages in the same township in Mon State.

At the end of the month on 29 March, more violence plagued civilians of Mon State. In Bilin Township, the Burma Army indiscriminately fired with artillery mortars. Five civilians were wounded, including children and seniors. Homes were also damaged.

One of the two children was in critical condition as the shell hit his right eye and head while a large mortar shell exploded on the house he lives. Mortars also hit an 80-year-old grandmother, another 13-year-old child, and a woman. Children and the elderly are not able to escape quickly in conflict, therefore increasing the need for protection.



Tanintharyi region

7000+ Newly Displaced

24 Injured, 13 Killed



Karen State



Mon State

Civilians in the Tanintharyi region fear uncertainty and unmatched violence as the junta targets young people.

The Junta Forces LIB No. 273 shot at a civilian truck returning from a football match, wounding six and arresting some of the villagers. The incident occurred on March 5, at about 7:15 pm, on the highway from Kyauk Sha village, to Yebyu, Dawei District. Residents who witnessed the shooting said about forty armed soldiers, including the junta forces, were conducting the secret operation, hiding in the rubber plantation along the highway. They started opening fire without stopping or seeing the truck. However, the regime claimed that the driver refused to stop the car, and they shot them.

“The six men were shot by the Light Infantry Battalion No. 273,” another source from Kyauk Sha village, who returned from his farm, confirmed.

The wounded villagers were originally from Mayanchaung village, Yebyu, Dawei. They are Zaw Win, age 39; Tun Naing, age 38; Thiha Zaw Aung, age 29; Yan Kyaw, age 27; Naing Oo, age 33; and Thura, age 28.

Junta forces in Tanintharyi Region have not only destroyed and looted village houses in the area of their military offensive but also continued confiscating and locking the houses and properties of activists and those associated with the National Unity Government and People’s Defense Forces in Yebyu and Dawei:

“The soldiers attempted to set fire to the house. The religious leaders, including monks and some village elders, appealed not to set fire. The house was locked and sealed,” another resident said.

On the afternoon of March 14, two fully furnished houses in Dawei were arbitrarily sealed and confiscated by the junta forces and their armed alliance, militias forces. The period market value of each home

is worth more than one hundred millionth Myanmar kyat each. A local said the junta forces conducted no arrests because family members fled.

Landmines also continue to pose a threat throughout the region. The members of local emergency response and social service said a family member of the junta battalion stepped on a landmine near the army compound by the LIB 561 unit and was seriously injured in Tanintharyi Township, southern Dawei.

“The LIB No. 561 was located in the middle of the confiscated cashew farm initially owned by local farmers in the 2000s. On that morning, the victim, Daw Aye Mu, age 47, a member of the army’s family, was hit by a landmine while picking cashews. Her right leg was seriously injured. We had to pick her up and refer her to the Myeik Military-run hospital that morning,” an unnamed social worker said.

“This is the ‘Karma chain’ in our religion. It means your condition right now results from your past and future actions. The military junta will reap even more bad returns if they continue their evil acts,” said a local villager in the area.

Meanwhile, the raiding of homes is ongoing. On March 21, 2023, at 10:00 AM, the joint forces of the junta and the state-backed militia forces in three military columns arrived at Tha-Kyet Taw village, Long Lon township, Dawei. They raided several houses, stole the belongings and arrested fourteen male villagers. They were divided into three columns of around 80 junta forces. Local militia members entered Tha-Kyet-Taw village and indiscriminately fired artillery shells before entering the town. At noon, they started destroying the houses left by the villagers and stealing their items. A total of 35 homes were damaged. The remaining villagers were taken out of their homes and interrogated by the Army Commanders and their forces. Witnesses also reported that on March 21, the junta seized at least 20 motorcycles and some valuable appliances and were taken away by Army Lorries.

Extrajudicial killings are also ongoing in the Tanintharyi region. HURFOM reporters network confirmed that an innocent local villager was shot and killed in Long Lon Township, Long Lon Township, Dawei. Joint troops of the junta’s battalions burned down ninety-six houses in Nyaw Pyin Village, Long Lon Township, Dawei District, and forty homes in Out-Kyauk-Wut village, totalling 136 houses. HURFOM reporters said a resident, Ko Aung Soe Min, 25 years old, was brutally shot and killed by military council troops in Out-Kyauk-Wut village on the afternoon of March 21, 2023.

“He was shot at when he went to put out a fire in the village. His head and face were crushed. The Burma Army is ruthless,” a local witness said.

Residents said houses were burning in Out-Kyauk-Wut village and Nyaw Pyin Village in Long Lon Township until around 7:00 PM on March 21. After the military left the town at 4 PM, a few locals entered to extinguish the fires. However, many homes are still burning.

On the evening of March 21, 2023, the soldiers of the Burma Army left the Nyaw-Pyin and Out-Kyauk-Wut villages. However, residents reconfirmed that the junta troops were still based in the Kyauk-Nee-Maw and Kyauk-Twin villages. The same day, another man was shot dead in Thayet-Chaung Township, Dawei, around 6:00 p.m.

The victim, U Htun Wai, was an older man over 60. Four unknown gunmen fired at him on two motorcycles.

The entire town of Thayet-Chaung has been stipulated as a 'black zone,' just like the northern townships of Dawei. These are areas where the junta troops and militias have continued to attack unarmed civilians.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Inflation across all target areas has devastatingly affected civilians who cannot meet their basic needs.
2. Clashes have led to forced internal displacement in Burma as instability and tensions move people from their homes.
3. Police and junta-backed militias continue to initiate door-to-door checks and arrest those on their wanted lists.
4. Concerns have spread as the military junta begins to make decisions that would bar competing democratic parties from the next election in Burma. The military junta has been trying to change/manipulate the numbers of constituencies.
5. Motorcycles, mobile devices, and money are confiscated and extorted from civilians at checkpoints stationed by the junta deliberately along critical routes. Civilians are forced to pay excessive bribes to retrieve their possessions. However, very few were able to afford the high costs.
6. Torture remains rampant in Burma and across target areas where innocent civilians are subjected to horrifying acts by the junta to extract information.
7. The international community, including UN bodies and ASEAN, is not responding swiftly enough to the situation in Burma, which demands urgent attention and consequences for the junta.
8. Military impunity remains deeply ingrained in the institutions representing the Tatmadaw, which only encourages the junta to continue perpetrating human rights violations.
9. Children are targeted by the military junta and deprived of basic needs, including medical attention, food, education, and the right to live safely.
10. The junta's arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention are ongoing, as are warrantless raids and indiscriminate firing into civilian areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A referral of the situation on the ground in Burma is to be made immediately by the United Nations Security Council to the International Criminal Court.
2. Concerted and coordinated action by global actors for an urgently mandated global arms embargo which would prevent the free flow of weapons into the hands of the murderous junta.
3. Aviation fuel sanctions to put an effective end to the airstrikes in Burma, which have contributed to significant loss of life, particularly among innocent civilians.
4. Targeted sanctions on military junta officials and their families and holds on their financial assets and possessions undercut their ability to conduct corrupt business dealings abroad.
5. Strengthened and renewed protection mechanisms grant civilians who are vulnerable and at risk of assault a position where they can access justice referral and accountability pathways.
6. Renewed and continued funding support for local organizations responding to the needs of their communities on the ground. Cross-border aid pathways must be accessed, and all humanitarian aid in the hands of local actors.
7. Foreign investors in Burma must immediately cease their operations and withdraw their involvement from all development projects in the country, including but not limited to airports, seaports, and cement businesses.
8. An abrupt and immediate halt to the use of torture by the military junta, and further, we call for investigations to probe the unlawful deaths of civilians in Burma who have been tortured to death, as well as those who have been forced to endure trauma and long-term injuries as a result.

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