

CRSV



SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER: ENDING MILITARY IMPUNITY IN BURMA/MYANMAR

Summary Overview

For decades, members of the Women's League of Burma (WLB), an umbrella organization comprising twelve members, have documented widespread and systematic crimes against women, including Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), long perpetrated by the military junta since we formed in 1999. This briefing paper—presented on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict—aims to amplify the voices and research of our members, who have recorded cases of violence in their respective states and regions across Burma/Myanmar.

Across more than 70 years, the military has plunged the country into war through violent and extractive means. The prolonged conflict has exposed women and children to the horrors of military dictatorship aggression while committing war crimes, atrocities, and crimes against humanity and genocide. Survivors have been forced to endure immense suffering and pain, all while trauma lingers and pathways to justice have been blocked.

In a patriarchal culture defined by male dominance, the social structure in Burma/Myanmar frequently signals that women are to blame for incidents of abuse. This oppressive environment discourages victims from discussing their trauma, much less reporting the various crimes committed against them.

Yet women human rights defenders have spoken truth to power by demanding justice and accountability for the military junta's crimes. They are calling for an end to the culture of military dictatorship impunity in Burma/Myanmar, which has allowed Military junta soldiers to evade any consequences for their actions. Despite ongoing appeals to the international community for justice, there has been no significant action that creates a firm and consistent precedent in Burma/Myanmar to demonstrate that all forms of violence are in grave violation of international laws, including those stated in the Geneva Convention.



Women and the LGBTQI community face increasing rates of sexual violence without justice and accountability. Sexual violence is on the rise, with the military junta being the primary perpetrator. However, some victims have also been exploited by the country's resistance People's Defense Forces (PDFs), the military arm of the National Unity Government (NUG), and the Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROS). Local resistance groups have their own accountability systems, but there remains space to engage them on human rights. The junta, by contrast, has spent decades avoiding responsibility for its crimes and continues to operate under the protection of military Junta impunity.

Over the last decade, WLB members have documented numerous cases that demonstrate how domestic protections and the judicial system, with their legal frameworks, have failed survivors and their families. In Burma/Myanmar, armed groups frequently employ various forms of violence, particularly in ethnic conflict-affected areas, as a means of control and repression, undermining the dignity, safety, and security of women and girls.

While there is a law against rape in the *Penal Code, Section 375*, with a punishment of up to ten years, many *limitations* within it fail to preserve the integrity of the victim. Often, women in Burma/ Myanmar also do not receive adequate legal protections, including basic protections for privacy and legal representation. Notably, since the Military attempted a 2021 coup, all provisions, even those that were grossly inadequate to protect victims, have been entirely ignored by the junta.

In addition to providing a contextual analysis of concerns about CRSV in Burma/Myanmar, the findings presented in this briefing paper demonstrate how women-led organizations of the WLB have fiercely advocated for mechanisms and protections for survivors at the regional and international levels. Case studies by our members will be included as an evidence-based tracker of how ethnic women across all states and regions have been affected by the various forms of CRSV including the use of rape as a weapon of war.

Further, "Speaking Truth to Power: Ending Military Impunity in Burma/Myanmar" seeks to address the dark history of the military and their crimes of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and CRSV, along with their direct impacts on women and conflict-affected communities. It will serve as a tool to approach the response to CRSV with strengthened and renewed calls for accountability. Combined with analysis, this briefing will present evidence that makes it alarmingly clear the systematic nature of the junta's crimes against women, as well as the urgency required for global stakeholders to act on the recommendations presented to ensure an end to military rule in Burma/Myanmar.

Human Rights Situation in Burma

Our member organizations have researched and produced numerous reports highlighting the persistent military impunity. The various governments in Burma/Myanmar, all historically dominated by the shadow of the military, have reduced the role of women by hindering their participation in public spaces and attempting to weaken their fundamental rights and freedoms further.

Across the country, women have been targeted by the military junta, in violation of the UN Charter, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, as well as the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.



International instruments, including CEDAW, which Burma/Myanmar acceded to in 1997, exist to promote due diligence by international actors to adhere to the protection and promotion of women's rights. In 2008, the CEDAW Committee *expressed concern* about the epidemic of domestic violence and sexual violence, including rape in Burma/Myanmar.

Although efforts to promote gender equality have been made, such as the NLD-led government's development of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) and its endorsement of the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, these initiatives have not been meaningfully implemented. The Women's League of Burma (WLB) has firmly concluded that no leadership in Burma/Myanmar has shown the political will to enact the policies and enforcement mechanisms necessary to address the challenges faced by women, especially those from ethnic communities.

In 2016, WLB released its CEDAW Shadow Report, titled *'Long Way To Go: Continuing Violations of Human Rights and Discrimination Against Ethnic Women in Burma'*, which presented detailed evidence of the systematic denial of equality to ethnic women and the lack of adherence to the equality and non-discrimination guarantees that CEDAW mandates.

Among the key findings was the failure of the then-junta, led by former military general Thein Sein, to address any of the root causes of gender inequality, notably within the 2008 military-drafted Constitution, which *"establishes structural barriers to equality, and discriminates outright against women."* Crimes against women, notably rape, are rarely investigated by the military. Junta and those that do go to court are held in military tribunals—barred from civilian oversight and lack transparency.

Conflict Related Sexual Violence: 2015 - 2025

Over the past decade, between 2015 and 2025, Burma/Myanmar's human rights situation has significantly deteriorated, leading to a shrinking environment for women and girls to live safely and peacefully. Through member-led documentation, the Women's League of Burma has found that cases of CRSV, SGBV, and GBV have surged over the past decade, as the military junta continues to operate without accountability (see annex for detailed documentation). Over the last four years, WLB has *documented* over 100 cases of CRSV in Burma/Myanmar; however, given the number of unreported instances, this figure is likely much higher. Even in areas where the military junta has declared "ceasefires," these agreements have often served as diplomatic cover rather than genuine commitments—historically, the regime has consistently failed to honor them.

CRSV is a routine tactic used by the junta to disempower women in Burma/Myanmar. Women have been taken hostage, tortured, and killed in the junta's targeted offensives, which isolate conflict-affected communities. Reports of violence against women have become alarmingly common. Junta and pro-military militia raids into local villages are among the most frequently employed acts of terror perpetrated by the military. During these violent intrusions, women face a serious risk of sexual violence, including gang rape.

In one case documented by Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization in 2023, a woman who was violently gang raped by military junta forces described her experience to WLB:

"The first man was tall and thin, threatened me with a long sword before raping me. The second man was short and dark-skinned, threatened me with a sword, raped me, and left saying another person would come. The third man had a pockmarked face and threatened me with a long gun before raping me."



She then explained how, following the incident, she escaped, carrying her disabled brother on her back. The PDF (Shwebo Group) and the PDF (Ayadaw Group) joined forces to help them reach Ayadaw Township. She is currently taking shelter there. However, their refuge was burned down, resulting in the loss of all the materials provided to them in the fire.

Ethnic women and LGBTQI people are particularly *vulnerable* to torture, including sexual violence. These violations are exacerbated by the lack of redress for survivors in conflict areas, as well as the limited access to sexual and reproductive health services. Clinics are often located far from local villages, making travel to them high-risk due to the prevalence of landmines, ongoing fighting, and frequent military checkpoints that can delay life-saving care.

Further, among the most consistent findings is that the security of women and girls is threatened by land confiscation and increased militarization driven by large-scale development projects. The growing presence of the junta in ethnic areas has also been a driving force behind ongoing sexual violence in both conflict zones and areas with increased militarization, where victims are denied access to justice. This has been ongoing for decades. In a case documented by Karen Women's Organization in 2006, a survivor reported:

My Aunt asked me to follow the Burmese soldiers, and those Burmese soldiers asked my Aunt to return and let me stay with them alone. But I didn't want to stay alone because I feared them. But she left me, and then three Burmese soldiers asked me to accompany them. They wore army uniforms.

After walking for about 15 minutes, two of them pulled me into the bushes and raped me. The other one stood guard. I tried to shout, but they closed my mouth. They raped me one by one on the ground in the bushes. I was alone and afraid of them. While one of them closed my mouth, one raped me. I pushed them and tried to protect myself, but they were too strong and there were two of them, so I could not defend myself.

After they raped me, they let me go back and told me not to tell anyone. I felt so sad and sorry because I felt shy and didn't want my friends and neighbours to know about it. Otherwise, they will look down on me and gossip about me.

One of the most horrific acts of CRSV that took place in the last decade was with two ethnic Kachin teachers, Maran Lu Ra (age 20) and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin (age 21). The two women were *brutally raped* and then murdered in January 2015 in Kaunghka village, Northern Shan State. One year later, the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) and the Legal Aid Network published a joint paper which exposed the complicity of the soldiers who committed the attack and then took calculated steps to ensure that evidence of the crime was intentionally *mismanaged*. The regime *ultimately failed* to investigate the case thoroughly and actively sought to conceal the horrific facts of the case. Ten years later, there is still no accountability for the victims' families.

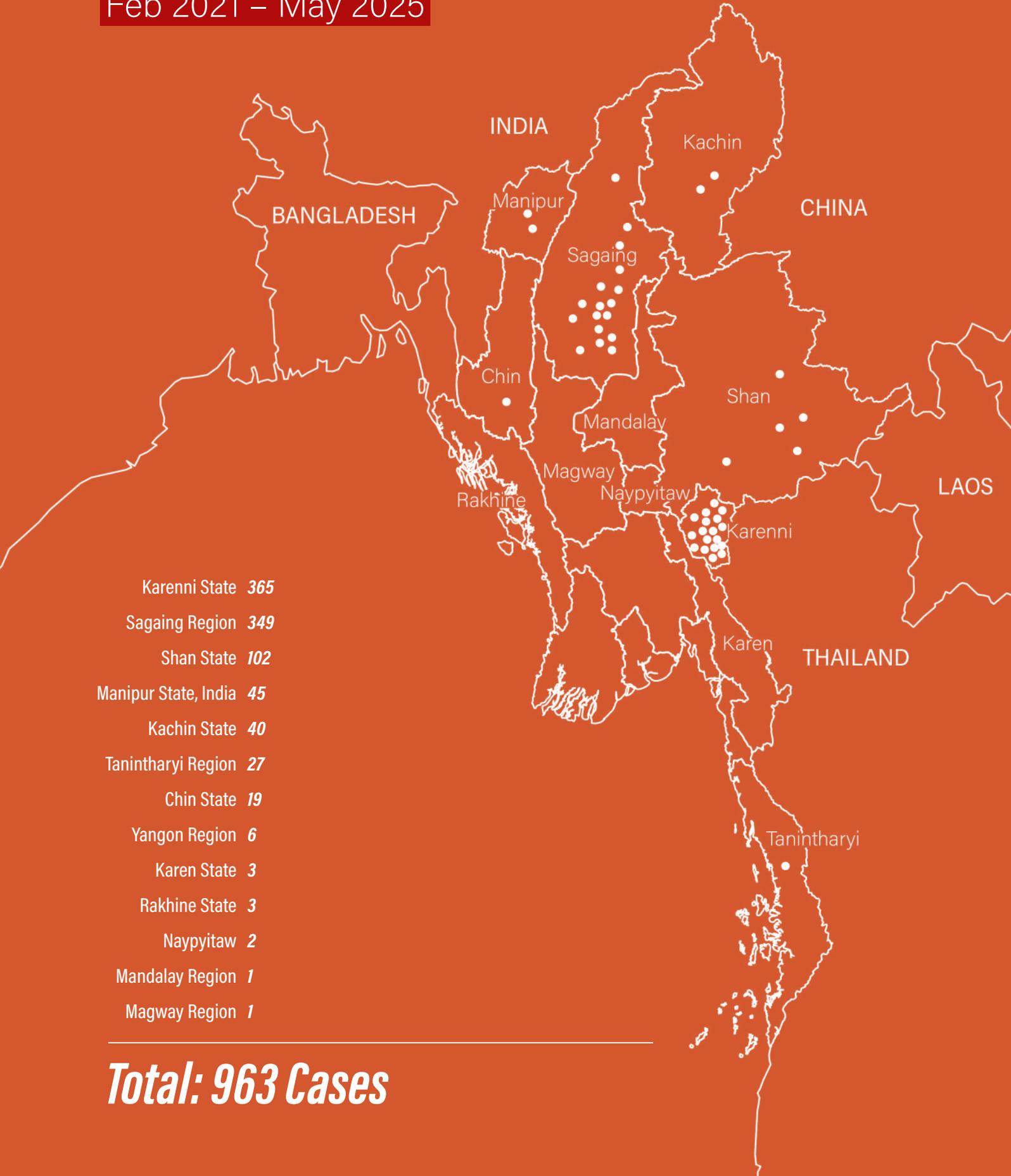
The KWAT General Secretary at the time, Moon Nay Li, responded to ignoring appeals for a transparent and inclusive investigation by *stating*: "The government's priorities were clear in the Kawng Kha case—protect the military at all costs."

WLB has continued to document worsening cases of CRSV and crimes against women, including being used as human shields and being forcibly detained. Their homes and properties also continue to be destroyed. For example cases of CRSV collected by WLB, please see the annex.



Conflict-Related Sexual Violence & Gender Based Violence Data Mapping

Feb 2021 – May 2025



Karenni State	365
Sagaing Region	349
Shan State	102
Manipur State, India	45
Kachin State	40
Tanintharyi Region	27
Chin State	19
Yangon Region	6
Karen State	3
Rakhine State	3
Naypyitaw	2
Mandalay Region	1
Magway Region	1

Total: 963 Cases

Access to Justice

The long history of unpunished CRSV and related crimes in Burma/Myanmar has only worsened since the Military attempt to Coup, which has effectively destroyed any remaining avenues for reform or justice. This crisis is rooted in deeply flawed domestic legal frameworks—outdated colonial-era laws that are both overly punitive and inadequate in addressing the scope and severity of GBV and CRSV.

Moreover, cultural norms and additional obstacles can prevent victims from pursuing justice through official channels. Women also face financial hurdles in seeking justice. When a female human rights defender advocates for a victim of sexual violence, she remains vulnerable to threats and harassment.

The collapse of formal justice systems in Burma/Myanmar is evidenced by a lack of stable and reliable rule of law, which deliberately undermines the protection, promotion, and preservation of women's rights. Moreover, women's access to justice is obstructed by discriminatory patriarchal and cultural norms, customary laws, economic barriers, and corruption. Discrimination against women is widespread, impacting their ability to enjoy their rights and seek justice for violations, as corruption in the courts is willingly endorsed by the regime.

Before the military attempted a coup in February 2021, achieving justice through formal means was already challenging, particularly due to the financial obstacles of travelling to court sessions and legal costs. Deep-rooted biases entrenched within the legal system often discouraged victims and survivors from coming forward to pursue justice. Women's organizations, like WLB members, have consistently aimed to fill these gaps by offering local justice referral systems.

Survivors continue to face considerable obstacles, including expensive and time-consuming legal processes. Women frequently face pressure to resort to informal justice systems or to remain silent to avoid bringing shame to their families. When cases do progress through the formal legal system, women and girls endure further trauma due to mandatory involvement in public trials, insufficient gender sensitivity training for justice personnel, and a lack of adequate protective measures for survivors and witnesses. For ethnic women, the language in which the trials take place is also considered yet another challenge, as many in rural areas do not speak Burmese.

Women seeking accountability in domestic violence cases, long-held stigmas that discriminate against victims, often result in inadequate penalties for perpetrators. The involvement of local administrators and village heads in Burma/Myanmar has traditionally aimed to protect the offender to preserve the status quo, while neglecting to address systematic inadequacies at all levels of the legal system that continue to fail women.

The scope of legal pathways available to survivors sought reform in the initial drafting of the Protection and Prevention of Violence Against Women Law in 2013; however, as documented by WLB, this was also met with *problematic shortfalls* that included inadequately addressing CRSV by state actors.

In post-coup Burma/Myanmar, new and emerging challenges exist in tackling CRSV, notably the complete lack of reliance on any justice pathways in the country. The current legal system not only protects soldiers of the military junta but also promotes impunity by isolating survivors and ignoring the plight of their suffering. The existing gaps in accountability also emphasize the need to promote women's access to justice and ensure that cases related to deliberate attacks on civilian lives are taken seriously by the international community and global actors. The responses must be gender-sensitive and community-led.



Lack of Social Support Services for Survivors

Currently, with more than 3.5 million individuals displaced, numerous women and young girls are residing in informal settlements to flee the conflict. In these remote areas, they lack access to legal representation. Victims face challenges in obtaining treatment, mental health services, police protection, and legal support following incidents of violence.

In areas significantly affected by the ongoing civil war, coordinating among service providers can be challenging, especially ensuring access to health and legal services. Economic insecurity and rising levels of poverty have made support systems feel particularly out of reach. Drug cultivation and trade have also contributed to addiction, which increases the likelihood of a woman experiencing CRSV or GBV.

With gaps in available maternal health and reproductive health services, the rate of miscarriages, especially in conflict areas, can be especially distressing for women. The urgent decision to escape in crises has resulted in cases of miscarriages and prenatal distress in women. At the same time, limited medical resources have intensified the complications and risks associated with childbirth. The difficulty in accessing safe and reliable care is high-risk, which also presents challenges in ensuring that their infants and young children receive life-saving vaccinations.

Girls and women are facing growing challenges around reproductive health, hygiene, and access to essential care. Ongoing violence has severely limited maternal health services and contraceptive access, leaving pregnant women and mothers increasingly anxious about their well-being. Displaced women are especially vulnerable to waterborne and mosquito-borne diseases like cholera, dengue fever, and malaria, while a lack of clean water and nutritious food further weakens their health.

Combined with a lack of accessible and available information, mothers and young women risk making decisions that can be detrimental to their health, such as engaging in traditional nutritional practices that may harm them or their infants if they are pregnant.

Discriminatory Gender Norms and Patriarchal Views

Long-held gender biases and views consider women the weaker sex in Burma/Myanmar. This has shaped a culture that actively discriminates against them, even in cases where harmful behaviors and attitudes violate their rights, such as CRSV and GBV. This discrimination extends to all social and political arenas in Burma/Myanmar, including education, where young girls often feel pressured to drop out of school to resume traditional roles within the home and marry young. This discourages them from seeking higher education opportunities and increases the vulnerability of girls and women to trafficking and exploitation. Furthermore, Burmanization policies often lead to the closure of non-Burman schools in ethnic areas.

For survivors of gendered violence, stigma and fear of damaging the perpetrator's reputation often take precedence over justice. Many are afraid to disclose the details of the various forms of violence against them due to the long-held stigma that discriminates against survivors. Civil society organizations have worked to dispel these stereotypical views and encourage women to pursue the paths they are interested in, including local governance and politics, where women have typically been excluded.

Trauma and Isolation

Amid the ongoing threat of weaponized sexual violence in Burma/Myanmar, women and girls have sought a haven from the military junta's widespread and systematic sexual violence against civilians. Survivors of CRSV, SGBV, GBV and women's human rights defenders working to protect them often endure severe psychological trauma that impacts their ability to focus, work, and form relationships.

Without reliable coping mechanisms available to them, some may be forced to re-live their trauma and subconsciously permit it to permeate their identity. Reintegration into their communities is especially difficult for survivors and victims, especially in the absence of necessary support services.

The lack of healing pathways, tools and resources available to survivors has forced many to live with the stigma of the crimes perpetrated against them. Women-led organizations and ethnic health organizations are often the only service providers who can support survivors, but face challenges due to a lack of resources and sustainable funding sources.

Violence in Migration

The humanitarian crisis in Burma/Myanmar has been protracted and prolonged for decades due to the violence committed by the Burma/ Myanmar military. The subsequent impacts on migration have left women exposed to immense risks of crossing paths with soldiers. Beyond violence, economic struggles, political turmoil, and inadequate access to essential services like healthcare drive migration from Burma/Myanmar. Additionally, many youths are escaping Myanmar due to concerns over government harassment or military conscription, especially since the junta announced earlier this year that women would be *recruited*.

Further, migrant women in neighbouring countries, due to their illegal status, remain vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse by authorities, employers, and other civilians. This is *compounded* by the fact that they are often considered 'security threats' by Thai policymakers and politicians.

For women, these types of discrimination are *challenging* not just due to their identities as migrants, but also their gender. Survivors of violence or gender-based discrimination, whether at work or home, are often coerced by their perpetrators into silence, fearing exposure of their legal status. These factors severely restrict women's movements, as arrest, deportation, and rape by authorities pose constant risks.

A striking example of migration driven by violence is the Rohingya, who have faced persecution. Their situation worsened in 2017 due to a military crackdown in Rakhine State, causing more than *700,000 Rohingya* to flee to Bangladesh. The military *committed crimes of rape and CRSV* against women in villages attempting to escape. Reports indicate that the Burmese Army also *burned* Rohingya homes and used rape as a weapon of war to terrorize them including brutalizing women with wounds to their bodies as they were *subjected* to gang rape and other forms of violence.



Ongoing Conflict and the Worsening Humanitarian Crisis

Conflicts have escalated between the junta and ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs). Concurrently, natural disasters and reduced donor support have exacerbated conditions nationwide. The growing number of IDPs has heightened the need for humanitarian assistance. Essential supplies, such as clothing and food for newborns and pregnant women, are scarce yet desperately needed. By the end of 2024, nearly 20 million people in Burma/Myanmar will urgently require humanitarian aid, including over six million children and more than seven million women.

According to UN *estimates*, there are at least 3.5 million IDPs. However, local organizations, which have better access to conflict zones and are more reliable in emergency responses, report even higher numbers in their areas. This data highlights a humanitarian crisis that demands immediate attention. The continuing conflict has caused millions of civilians to lose everything, and many are afraid to return home due to the junta's indiscriminate attacks on their villages.

According to WLB's report on the humanitarian aid crisis between 2021 and 2024, the junta *deployed* CRSV during their military operations to "terrorize communities, weaken resistance efforts, and enforce domination."

The conflict has heightened the vulnerability of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, leading to a rise in sexual violence and exploitation, particularly in ethnic minority regions. Despite this, some resistance organizations in these areas have started creating judicial and protective systems to tackle instances of sexual violence, providing a glimmer of hope for survivors. Nonetheless, considerable obstacles persist in implementing these systems effectively.

Due to the ongoing conflict, civilians, particularly women and ethnic minorities, desperately need humanitarian aid. However, the military junta has intentionally obstructed vital assistance. Aid routes are blocked, and civilians risk arrest if found with large amounts of food, medicine, or other necessary supplies. Other humanitarian issues include limited access to healthcare, and women are facing gender-specific health problems linked to pregnancy and menstruation.

The military Junta's intentional blocking of aid to impacted communities reflects its ongoing aggression against innocent civilians, particularly ethnic minorities and women, who endure the brunt of armed conflicts and natural disasters. This tactic of weaponizing aid has also blocked the activities of international organizations attempting to assist isolated communities, where ethnic women encounter heightened dangers, including gender-based violence and exploitation due to insufficient resources.

Reprisals and Targeting of Women-Led Organizations

Women human rights defenders in ethnic areas face serious risks as armed conflicts wreak havoc. Like their counterparts in urban areas, they have endured increased restrictions on civil liberties. They also often face violence when they attempt to assert these rights. Some junta-backed informants are deeply embedded in communities. It is difficult to know who they are, adding considerable stress to women operating in areas where they are assisting victims and conflict-affected communities.



Many local women's groups report that survivors of CRSV are enduring physical and mental trauma, which has affected their ability to concentrate and build relationships. However, under the current crisis, access to mental healthcare is limited. Local women-led organizations continue to provide care through programs focused on survival, empowerment, counseling, and safe house services. Logistical and security challenges also exist for women human rights defenders attempting to coordinate safe and secure access for survivors.

Additionally, numerous ethnic organizations are compelled to operate underground, as the junta routinely issues arrest warrants for WLB members and staff. Recent documentation reveals that at least a dozen women human rights defenders have been sentenced to death by the junta.

Women are at the forefront of delivering social services and humanitarian assistance in conflict zones. Although men primarily participate in armed resistance, these soldiers rely heavily on the contributions of their mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. These women have embraced additional responsibilities at home and in the community as they navigate new roles.

Increased Presence of Military Junta Soldiers in Local Villages and Townships Across Burma

As the junta loses territory and bases, it has turned to forced conscription to recruit young men and women to fight their battles. Along with junta-backed informants stationed at various checkpoints nationwide, there has been an increase in extortion, bribery, arbitrary arrests, and torture within military facilities. Women travelling through these checkpoints are often subjected to harassment and detainment in junta custody, where their safety and fundamental rights are at risk.

The growing presence of military soldiers is profoundly concerning. Following raids on villages, the junta is burning homes, unjustly arresting people and killing them, as well as shooting and shelling civilians. Women and young girls face a heightened risk of sexual violence from the junta, along with increased threats to their physical safety and overall well-being. Further, the intensity, scale, and frequency of the junta's assaults have aggravated the displacement crisis, leaving communities powerless by severely restricting access to education, livelihoods, health, and security.

The risks have been even higher since the junta expanded its military operations. Women who are displaced by ongoing conflict are forced to flee regularly. They must always move quickly to ensure the junta does not catch up with them. Documentation efforts, including collecting evidence of human rights violations, have been compromised by the Burma Army's expanded presence.

Role of Women

Despite the abovementioned challenges, women's roles have evolved since the military attempted to coup on 1 February 2021, placing them at the forefront of calls for change. *Sixty percent of the pro-democracy movement* consists of women, and at least 70 are leaders in some capacity. More than two-thirds engaged in peaceful protests following the coup, and nearly all remain resourceful contributors to humanitarian relief efforts. At the same time, 50% assumed leadership roles in local governance. These findings make it abundantly clear the remarkable resilience women can demonstrate, even when confronted with substantial adversity.

During these revolutionary times, women from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic situations have continued to lead advocacy efforts for reform by organizing to raise awareness of women's rights and their right to participate at all levels of governance and in social sectors. Their work on the front lines is a testament to their unwavering strength and resilience and indicates their commitment to supporting survivors of CRSV.



Women's leadership has been shaped through an intersectional lens that strives for inclusivity to address the challenges faced by marginalized women. This has included non-violent tactics to challenge patriarchal norms, structures, attitudes, and beliefs in Burma/Myanmar, such as through the '*Sarong Revolution*,' which saw women hang their tamen undergarments in the streets to challenge superstitious beliefs that such items are unlucky for the men, notably junta-backed policemen and soldiers, who walk under them.

Women have made strides despite immense turmoil, including the long-standing risks of CRSV. The WLB report "*Building the Triple Resistance*" found that women human rights defenders continue their work despite facing physical and digital security risks. Even amidst violence, these women are committed to dismantling military rule. Nearly all interviewees for the WLB report are involved in humanitarian efforts, with half also taking on political roles, particularly as federalism gains traction.

Organizations led by women are *leading* relief efforts in conflict-affected areas of Burma. They provide *crucial support* to victims of gender-based violence (GBV), including counselling, food packages, and dignity kits that contain menstrual hygiene items and essentials for expectant or new mothers. Similarly, local women's organizations *collaborate* within our networks to ensure the swift and secure delivery of aid through cross-border channels, effectively and efficiently meeting the needs of displaced groups, primarily women and children. Despite the circumstances, women's human rights defenders have remained united and committed to their collective demand for a federal democratic future. Achieving this requires not only the defeat of an oppressive military junta but also a confrontation with patriarchal oppression.

WLB Role

The role of the WLB is to serve as a platform for women of Burma/Myanmar to advocate for political change and strive for gender equality in society. WLB represents its member organizations, advocating on behalf of women and their families in various situations, whether they are inside the country, displaced to refugee camps, or living as undocumented migrant workers in neighbouring countries. The following are active areas of our involvement:

Human rights reporting

The reports that WLB members have researched, written and produced over the years make clear that women have continued to face staggering levels of violence from across the country, but especially in ethnic areas including Kachin State, Karen State, Mon State, Chin State, Shan State and Karenni State. The common factor in all cases recorded is the brutalization of ethnic women alongside the insufficient prosecution of offenders.

WLB member organizations have consistently been advocating for reform by documenting evidence of the repeated gendered crimes against women for decades. The thematic issues that continue to emerge across the reports are how women's equality and access to fundamental freedoms are consistently undermined by the patriarchal, notably militarized entities in Burma/Myanmar.

Lobbying and advocacy at the International Level

WLB is uniquely positioned to advocate for women and effect change due to its role as a hub where grassroots, regional, and international efforts converge. The advocacy strategies developed by WLB involve engaging at these various levels, aiming to simultaneously elevate the voices of our member organizations on the global stage while also acquiring knowledge, experience, connections, and resources to bring back to their respective communities.

WLB has consistently lobbied governments to tackle the root causes of the challenges confronting women and girls in Burma/Myanmar. In March 2025, during the Beijing Platform for Action 30 years and beyond: A critical review and future direction for Burma/Myanmar, WLB General Joint Secretary 1 acknowledged that WLB's ongoing commitment to dismantling societal patriarchal systems resulting in gender inequality is as crucial as ending military dictatorship.

WLB has also attended several alliance meetings and donor gatherings to foster collaboration and secure support for their ongoing work. Moreover, WLB regularly attends the Asia Pacific Women's Networks' Conferences, including Asia Pacific NGO Consultations with UN Special Rapporteurs on thematic issues and the AWID International Conference every three years. Between 2009 and 2024, over 30,000 people of all genders participated in WLB programs and received assistance and 553 training, workshops, and public events.

To build alliances and strengthen partnerships, Policy Board members and the Secretariat have held meetings with EROs to promote women's peace and security issues. Between January and June 2024, WLB participated in the Second People's Assembly, engaging with various organizations and individuals to discuss the future of women's rights and peace.

Gender education, training and empowerment amongst ourselves and within our communities displaced from Burma

WLB was created as the first umbrella organization for women's groups from Burma, representing different ethnic and political backgrounds. The organization has remained committed to raising awareness of gender equality in local communities, including gender education, training, and empowerment within communities displaced from Burma/Myanmar and those inside the country, as well as raising gender issues through programs along borders and inside the country.

Since the 2021 coup, WLB has increased its response to conflict-affected communities by offering vital support services such as food, sanitation kits, and healthcare to more than 47,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and various human rights activists. Between July and December 2024, WLB provided emergency financial assistance to 188 WHRDS across various regions and states, including Bago, Magway, Karenni, Kachin, the Thai-Burma border, Chiang Mai, the Karenni-Thai border, and multiple locations in India, including Manipur State, Tengnoupal District, and Moreh Township. Additional aid was given to women in Haolenphai IDP Camp, northern and southern Shan State, Sagaing Region, Tachileik, and Keng Tung to carry out awareness-raising and leadership activities.

WLB also plays a crucial role in meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of displaced women, girls, and LGBT individuals. Their support includes distributing food and sanitation supplies, baby clothes, infant milk, mother vitamins, delivery kits, and cash aid for pregnant women. WLB has also offered 130,000 MMK (61 USD) in cash assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Thayetchaung and Launglon townships of Tanintharyi Division, helping them acquire shelter materials and medical supplies, especially for women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals.

These efforts empower women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals to recognize and assert their rights while creating safer surroundings for them amid ongoing displacement and conflict. By prioritizing the needs and voices of marginalized groups, WLB promotes a gender-sensitive and ethnically inclusive approach to humanitarian support, ensuring that no one is overlooked in the pursuit of safety, dignity, and rights.



Raising gender issues in programs inside Burma

Despite ongoing political challenges, violence, and humanitarian crises, WLB led advocacy efforts, provided emergency support, and helped strengthen local women leaders. Additionally, WLB has conducted training, workshops, and forums on Women, Peace, and Security, International Humanitarian Law, Transitional Justice, and political forums. These activities helped women develop leadership skills and bolster peace efforts.

To build capacity, WLB organizes workshops and short training sessions to raise awareness or develop skills on specific topics, runs internship programs, and conducts six-month political empowerment courses for women from each member organization. We have also focused on organizational development, hosting strategic workshops to enhance the capacity of our member organizations.

Conclusion

Systems of oppression necessitate a collective effort to end the subjugation experienced by ethnic women and minorities in Burma/Myanmar. The response to CRSV is no exception.

At the international level, global stakeholders have fundamentally failed to recognize the circumstances that women and girls encounter amid the impunity that drives continuing sexual violence attacks. Although women-led organizations, such as the members of WLB, have documented cases intended as evidence against the junta in courts at the international level, the legal process has been slow, and diplomatic representatives have not acknowledged the urgency of offering comprehensive support to CRSV survivors.

Of significant concern is the lack of decisive action taken by the UN Security Council as military attacks against women continue to escalate. WLB fears this inaction indicates a disregard and unwillingness to end the reign of the military junta's brutality. Consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2669, adopted in 2022, immediate cessation of violence in Burma/Myanmar is necessary, with a focus on safeguarding the civilian population, especially women and children.

This resolution demands more transparency on what tangible steps are being taken to ensure the regime is held accountable for its widespread crimes. The lack of monitoring and insistence that the junta and all armed actors abide by this resolution deters meaningful engagement, which has only emboldened the junta to continue disregarding any international condemnation. Furthermore, without enforcement, the Resolution is nothing short of bureaucratic negligence.

More decisive action is essential to seek justice in Burma/Myanmar. States that are parties to the Rome Statute should refer the military junta to the International Criminal Court (ICC) due to their widespread crimes against humanity, including acts of rape and CRSV affecting women and girls. Ongoing judicial efforts at the International Court of Justice need support, and domestic proceedings should also be initiated through the principle of universal jurisdiction.

WLB also urges global stakeholders to facilitate the creation of a special or regional accountability mechanism to hold the military junta accountable for systemic gendered violence. Additionally, transitional justice pathways must be established to ensure reparations for survivors and the families of victims. Impartial and independent inquiries into incidents of GBV, SGBV and CRSV are essential. Practical and tangible measures must be implemented to break the cycle of impunity.

Furthermore, if the military junta is not held accountable, the regime will continue to make life intolerable. Historically, the world has focused its attention on Burma/Myanmar only during times of intense volatility. As the country's civil war disappears from the headlines, the military interprets this inaction as a free pass to kill, rape, assault, and detain innocent people.

Support from the international community requires global and regional audiences to confront the injustices that occur, rather than ignoring them. They should have the courage to resist and hold the junta accountable. It is essential to terminate all dealings, business connections, and any existing or past relationships with the regime, redirecting support to the revolutionary initiatives led by the people, especially the women on the ground in Burma, insisting that the future of federalism is intersectional.

The journey ahead may be challenging, but at the very helm are women occupying spaces and positions in leadership roles across various political and social arenas in what is a new and emerging Burma/Myanmar. Their efforts continue to erode gender stereotypes as women refuse to be held captive under a dictatorship that does



not recognize or value their rights. The formidable resilience and unity of women human rights defenders in Burma/Myanmar are grounded in their commitment to peace and protection for all people.

What is possible in a democratic and inclusive future, Burma/Myanmar has no limits. For women, this means an end to systematic oppression that has attempted to erase their pain and suffering. Women-led service providers and organizations have been shaping and strengthening local communities for years by providing life-saving assistance and psychological support to survivors while educating communities on women's rights to ensure a gender-equal future. These efforts must be bolstered by financial and technical support to ensure that survivors of CRSV have the necessary resources for their healing. Direct funding towards programs that assist survivors and victims' families through monetary assistance would better equip local, women-led organizations to advocate for security and protection.

It is also integral to advancing women's rights in Burma/Myanmar that networks be supported among women activists, human rights defenders, and civil society organizations. Their voices must be heard and amplified at the regional and international levels to advocate for women's participation, leadership, and responses to the many crises unfolding in the country with a gendered lens.

Despite the targeted militarized violence against them, women have continued to exhibit spirited resistance and exceptional bravery by overcoming numerous obstacles. They have persevered in pursuing justice, accountability, and equality for all people.

Recommendations

To the International Community/ Donors

- To support survivor referral pathways at the local level through funding ethnic, Local women-led organizations;
- Recognize the critical role of local civil society and community - based organizations, such as the Women's League of Burma (WLB), in delivering services and humanitarian aid.
- Prioritize humanitarian funding directly to these local efforts in various states, regions, and cross-border areas;
- Consult and coordinate with the National Unity Government and ethnic resistance organizations when providing humanitarian assistance.
- Provide flexible and appropriate funding to local civil society and community-based organizations with effective systems for delivering emergency aid.
- Ensure all funded projects include gender-responsive budgeting to address the specific needs of women and marginalized groups adequately.
- To support our calls (the people of Myanmar/ Burma) for the UNSCR and the UN Human Rights mechanism to take responsible actions against the Military junta for its continued atrocities;
- The international community, including the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, must investigate and ensure that those responsible for the crimes committed by the Military Junta's security forces, including killing, assaults, and detentions of civilians, are held accountable under international law;
- Invest in vocational training and livelihood opportunities for survivors, enabling them to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to their communities;
- Facilitate the development of survivor-centred transitional justice processes that prioritize the needs and experiences of women and marginalized groups.

To the United Nations Security Council

- Impose targeted economic sanctions, financial penalties, and restrictions on the Military junta leadership and businesses that are owned and controlled by the Burma/Myanmar military;
- Impose a comprehensive and global arms embargo on Burma/Myanmar;
- Refer the situation of Burma/Myanmar to the International Criminal Court to end the decades-long impunity of the Burma/Myanmar military junta and its security forces;

To ASEAN and Neighbouring Countries

- Provide Refugee Status: Grant refugee status to those fleeing conflict, protecting their rights, and facilitating assistance from UNHCR, international NGOs, and humanitarian organizations without restrictions.
- Sustain Humanitarian Assistance: Continue to provide sufficient humanitarian aid to conflict-affected IDPs and refugees, ensuring their voluntary and dignified return and resettlement along the Myanmar border;
- Support Cross-Border Aid: Facilitate cross-border assistance, delineate liberated zones, and ensure security for affected populations;
- Avoid Military Junta Channels: Ensure humanitarian aid does not pass through the military junta;
- Engage Local Governance: Consult and coordinate with the National Unity Government and ethnic resistance organizations in delivering humanitarian aid;
- Negotiate with Civil Society: Collaborate with Local civil society organizations, women's organizations, and service providers to ensure that timely and necessary humanitarian assistance reaches affected populations.



Below are some of the most prominent reports from our members, further illustrating the lack of justice that has prevailed.

Burmese Women’s Union

- Women Trailblazers: Call for a New Era of Reform (2022)
- Sexual Violence Against Women Under Political Instability (2023)

Kachin Women’s Association Thailand

- Bloodstained Gateways: escalating SAC abuses in northern Burma pave the way for BRI expansion (2023)
- New Threats from the Air (2022)
- Guarding Profits Not Lives (2020)
- No Justice for Ongoing Burma Army Crimes in Northern Shan State (2020)
- Seeking Justice (2020)
- Justice Held Hostage (2001)

Karenni National Women’s Organization

- “How Can We Survive in the Future?” Atrocity Crimes in Karenni State (2023)
- Silent Warriors (2025)

Karen Women’s Organization

- Shattering Silences: Karen Women speak out about the Burmese Military Regime’s use of Rape as a Strategy of War in Karen State (2004)
- State of Terror: The ongoing rape, murder, torture and forced labour suffered by women living under the Burmese Military Regime in Karen State (2007)
- Walking Amongst Sharp Knives (2010)

Kayan Women’s Organization

- အမျိုးသမီးနှင့်လျှန်ဒါအခြေပြုအကြမ်းဖက်မှုအခြေအနေ (2024)
- “How Can We Survive in the Future?” Atrocity Crimes in Karenni State (2023)

Shan Women’s Action Network

- License to Rape (2002)

Ta’ang Women’s Organization

- PEACE NEVER CAME: Systematic War Crimes and Human Rights Violations Perpetrated by the Tatmadaw in Ta’ang Areas of Northern Shan State (April 2016 - December 2019)

Tavoyan Women’s Union

- Our Lives Are Not for Sale (2014)



Annex:

Cases Collected by WLB on CRSV

- *April 27, 2018, Municipal Public Housing, Dawei Township*
Documented by the Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU)

A 23-year-old woman with an intellectual disability and limited speech disorder lived in municipal public housing with her aunt. Falling ill, she was admitted to the hospital, where doctors discovered that she was six months pregnant. Upon further investigation by the doctors and her aunt, she revealed that she was raped by her neighbour when she was doing laundry.

The perpetrator, a supervisor in charge of the municipal department and also the head of the municipal public housing, threatened to kill her if she told anyone. A judge dismissed the rape case because the victim's limited speech capabilities precluded her from describing in detail the attack.

- *April 2022, Shwebo Township, Sagaing Region*
Documented by Women for Justice

Daw Hnyi Hnyi Aye and her husband sought refuge in Ward 6, Shwebo City, in early 2022. She is originally from a village in Shwebo Township, and her hometown faced aerial bombings by the junta in 2022, forcing residents to flee for shelter.

In early April, Daw Hnyi Hnyi Aye went to Pathein Monastery in Mingun village to become a nun. On her third day there, armed members of the Bo Kaung Zan group arrived and took mobile phones and money from the monks and nuns. They also sexually assaulted young, attractive female nuns and forced them to watch pornography. The militia also detained travelers near the monastery, torturing them, and stopped a young man on the road, demanding his mobile phone. When he refused, they accused him of being a PDF (People's Defense Force) member and repeatedly stabbed him with their knives. The female devotees were verbally abused and also forced to watch pornography.

The militia spent one night at the monastery and left the next day at noon. Some of the kidnapped women returned injured and bleeding. Later, they called Daw Nyinyi Aye to check her phone and took her to the monastery's sermon hall. As they tried to assault her, a senior monk arrived and spoke to their leader. After their talk, the leader told his men, "Hey, don't do anything to her."

Before letting her go, two militiamen grabbed her hands and warned her to stay quiet, threatening to stab her if she tried to escape. She was finally released but was deeply traumatized. Daw Nyinyi Aye is stable and has returned to her temporary shelter in Ward 6 of Shwebo Township. The Women's Justice Organization has been providing her with psychological support.

Follow-up:

Daw Nyinyi Aye remains in good health. Her husband works as a carpenter and a hired farmer, providing sufficient income for their household. Their children are married and occasionally visit, bringing food and other necessities to ensure their well-being. The situation in the area is currently stable.

- *January 23, 2023, Sartinn Village in Ayadaw Township, Monywa, Sagaing Region*
Documented by Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization

On January 23, 2023, a young woman named Ma Thida Htay, age 16, from Sartinn Village in Ayadaw Township, Monywa, Sagaing Region, was gang-raped by military junta forces and Pyu Saw Htee members.

Joint forces of the junta and Pyu Saw Htee members arrived at the area and beat Ma Thida Htay's disabled brother, accusing him of being a soldier in the People's Defense Force (PDF). Despite insisting her brother was disabled after falling from a cattle cart seven years ago, the military and Pyu Saw Htee members demanded to see X-ray evidence.

When Ma Thida Htay went to the hut where the X-rays were kept, the military council forces and Pyu Saw Htee members followed her and gang-raped her there. Three military council soldiers raped Ma Thida Htay. She described them as follows:

"The first man was tall and thin, threatened me with a long sword before raping me. The second man was short and dark-skinned, threatened me with a sword, raped me, and left saying another person would come. The third man had a pockmarked face and threatened me with a long gun before raping me."

Afterward, she was violently assaulted, and Ma Thida Htay's earrings were also taken. Following the incident, she escaped, carrying her disabled brother on her back. The PDF (Shwebo Group) and the PDF (Ayadaw Group) joined forces to help them reach Ayadaw Township. She is currently taking shelter there. However, their refuge was burned down, resulting in the loss of all the materials provided to them in the fire. Hence, they require both financial and psychological support.

● *August 6, 2023, Tizit Beach, Gaw Inn Village, Longlone Township, Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region Documented by Tavayon Women's Union*

On August 6, 2023, Ma Aye Zin (also known as Ma Hnin Si) went to Tizit Beach alone with Ko Linn (also known as Ko Linn Linn Soe) at his invitation on the full moon day. Ko Linn Linn Soe and Ma Aye Zin were close friends who often confided in each other about personal matters. Before going to the beach, Ko Linn Linn Soe asked Ma Aye Zin, "Do you want to eat something? What would you like to drink?" Ma Aye Zin said whatever was convenient. Ko Linn Linn Soe bought unfamiliar drinks known as 'full moon' beverages.

According to the victim's statement, she wasn't sure if Ko Linn Linn Soe had planned this. At that time, they both went up to a temple on the beach, and while searching for a place to rest, Ma Aye Zin discussed having issues with her mother at home while drinking the beverage he had brought her. Ko Linn Linn Soe listened and laughed, getting up twice to use the washroom. He then told Ma Aye Zin it was too sunny and invited her to move to another spot. After drinking two bottles, Ma Aye Zin followed him to change locations. Ma Aye Zin felt drowsy by that point, and Ko Linn Linn Soe laid her down and touched her body.

According to Ma Aye Zin's statement:

"While we were talking, he kissed me. Since he had said he loved me, I didn't think much of it. Then he embraced me and laid me down. I was very sleepy and was about to fall asleep. He didn't just kiss me, but touched my breasts. He put his hand inside my shirt and bra to touch them. He also sucked my breasts. When he did this, I hadn't lost consciousness yet. When I realized the situation wasn't right, I struggled with all my strength. When I struggled, he said, 'Just a moment, nothing will happen. Stay calm; it'll just be a moment.' I said, 'Don't do it. I want to be left alone. I'm sleepy. Don't bother me.'

Then he said nothing would happen and pulled down my pants. He didn't remove my underwear. He lifted my shirt. I struggled hard again and pulled it down. He said, 'Don't struggle; others will hear you. Don't scream or cry; if your clothes get dirty, you'll get scolded when you get home.' My hair was messy. He said he would tie it for me. I said I didn't want that and that I was sleepy, but when I struggled, he grabbed my hand and took off his pants. Then he said, 'Just a moment' and put on a condom.



I struggled with all my strength. Maybe because I was small, my leg got caught between his thighs. I kicked his thigh, but couldn't get free. He squeezed my breasts and inserted his fingers into my vagina twice. I don't even know how I felt about that. It hurt terribly.

Without removing my underwear, he pulled his hand out and positioned his genitals. When I struggled hard, maybe it didn't work for him; I had to struggle for a long time. I thought, I don't know what's happening to me now. I even wondered if I was going to be killed. Then he said he wouldn't do it anymore. 'I won't do it anymore. Don't say anything,' he said, so I stayed quiet.

As soon as I became quiet, he started again. When I struggled again, he stroked my head and said, 'Nothing will happen. It'll only take 1 minute. Using a condom won't make you pregnant.' I said I didn't want to do it. I don't even know what I was saying anymore. At that time, I was terrified and didn't want to endure what he was doing. Then he said, 'Okay, I won't do it anymore.' He said he would help me put my pants on and pick me up. He must have planned this. He had brought condoms with him.:

Ma Aye Zin is a member of the Longlone Strike Committee, and Ko Linn Linn Soe is from PDF Battalion 2 in Dawei. Currently, Ma Aye Zin is healthy, though she experienced trauma from this experience. She lives in Gaw Inn village.

WLB Data and Response to CRSV (Past and Present)

The documentation amassed by WLB over the years illustrates that women encounter numerous forms of violence in Burma/Myanmar, such as domestic violence, sexual violence, rape, attempted rape, sexual harassment, and trafficking.

- The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) reported 30 cases of sexual violence involving 35 women and girls, committed by Burma Army soldiers between April 2010 and May 2013. The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) and the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) documented 8 cases of sexual violence by Burmese soldiers, involving nine women, between 2010 and 2012.
- From 2010 to 2015, WLB reported 92 instances of conflict-related sexual violence, with only two prosecuted in civilian courts. In the following period of 2015-2016, WLB documented 18 cases of violence against women by state actors, of which only three reached prosecutions in civilian courts, with, at the time the report was published, one case still pending. Since the 2011 Universal Periodic Review, WLB has documented 73 crimes of sexual violence by the Burma Army in Kachin State, Karen State, Mon State, Chin State, Shan State, and Karenni State.
- Between 2017 and 2020, the 13 members of WLB reported 469 cases of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, rape and attempted rape. Throughout this period, of the 227 reported cases of domestic violence, 98% were committed by intimate partners, including spouses and ex-spouses.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sharp escalation in cases of violence in households as men resorted to harmful coping mechanisms such as drug and alcohol abuse amid economic challenges. At the same time, WLB documented 12 cases of sexual violence, 75% were perpetrated by a spouse or partner, 8% by a religious leader and 17% by neighbours.



- Out of the 133 documented rape cases, the vast majority – over 80% - involved particularly vulnerable women and girls, including those with disabilities, orphans, and those facing economic difficulties. More than 80% of documented rape cases (109 out of 133) involved very young child victims, with the youngest being five years old. Additionally, over half of the attempted rape cases (six out of 10) involved minors.
 - The Burmese Women's Union reported 36 cases of sexual violence and 23 cases of domestic violence, including adultery, documented in the field and 54 cases of sexual violence from 2021 to 2023.
 - WLB documented nearly 500 cases of sexual assault against women between 1 February and June 2024.
 - From 2021 to October 2024, the Karenni National Women's Organization documented 101 cases of physical violence, 65 cases of psychological violence, 21 cases of sexual violence and 14 cases of rape.
 - In 2023, the Kayan Women's Organization (KyWO) reported 11 complaints of sexual exploitation via deception, but the actual figure is likely significantly higher. KyWO also noted that none of these 11 reported cases went to court; instead, they were settled through compensation negotiations according to local customs.
 - According to a statement by the Burma Women's Union (BWU) on April 19, 2025, the military committed acts of violence in March 202, resulting in the murder of 66 women and injuries to 88 others. The deaths by region and state included 15 in Magway Region, 12 in Mandalay Region, 9 in Sagaing Region, 7 in Bago Region, 2 in Tanintharyi Region, 1 in Ayeyarwady Region, 2 in Rakhine State, 12 in Shan State, 2 in Kachin State, 2 in Karenni State, and 2 in Karen State.
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Reports by WLB Member Organizations

The documentation amassed by WLB over the years illustrates that women encounter numerous forms of violence in Burma/Myanmar, such as domestic violence, sexual violence, rape, attempted rape, sexual harassment, and trafficking.

- **In March 2002**, the paper "Breaking the Silence" by WLB was released and presented at the 46th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The discussions and data centered around social roles and gender stereotypes in Burma/Myanmar that have been used to disempower women and girls. The discrimination faced by women is heightened by poverty and environmental degradation in the country, which has fueled resource and land wars between the military junta and various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs).

Civil war and anti-insurgency policies that have waged destruction for decades have aggressively forced women to bear the burden of the conflicts being fought. The report notes that one of the most extensive scorched earth campaigns by the regime occurred in 1996 when 300,000 ethnic Shan people were forcibly relocated and hundreds of women and girls were tortured, raped and killed.

Extractive industries, including mining, have long disproportionately affected women and girls, as invasive mining practices not only harm local ecosystems in rivers and forests but also force displacement, with women and girls often being the majority affected. These conditions force women to seek livelihood opportunities outside their homes and villages, which are familiar to them, and can lead to the disintegration of traditional family units.

This report indicates that despite the challenges women face, they are 'breaking the silence' by refusing to accept the status quo, acting with agency, perseverance, and courage to break these damaging cycles.

- **In 2004**, WLB revealed findings exposing ongoing sexual violence by the regime's armed forces throughout Burma/Myanmar in a report called *System of Impunity*. A decade later, WLB published *Same Impunity, Same Patterns*, which found that state-sponsored sexual violence continues to threaten the lives of women in Burma/Myanmar.

Among its key findings was evidence that during the elections in 2010 and 2014, WLB and our member organizations documented 104 instances of sexual violence against women and girls—a figure far below the actual number of abuses that occurred.

The majority of the cases recorded by WLB were linked to military operations. The use of sexual violence in conflict acts as a counter-insurgency tactic and is closely associated with control over resource-rich ethnic regions. It was determined that the military's widespread use of sexual violence constituted potential war crimes and crimes against humanity according to international law.

In its follow-up report, "If they had hope, they would speak," the Women's League of Burma reaffirmed calls for survivor protections, highlighting that justice remains out of reach due to an opaque judiciary, official complicity in shielding the military, and the high cost of legal action.

- **In 2005**, WLB published the report "Any Progress for the Lives of Women in Burma since Beijing?" which pursued the question of accountability and international efforts to hold the Burmese Army responsible for its crimes against women. Ten years had passed since the Beijing Conference, and, as WLB concluded, 'for women from Burma, nothing has changed.'

The report summarizes the consequential impacts of the military and its derailment of women's rights, as well as its failure to take them seriously. At the Beijing Women's Conference in 1996, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the ruling military, sent a delegation led by a male military officer. The Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) was established the same year, with an all-male composition. In the subcommittees that followed to 'advance' gender equality, all the major stakeholders had military backgrounds.

The report also noted the economic mismanagement of the SPDC with egregious budget allocations to the military while underfunding education and health rights, all while simultaneously attacking civilians in ethnic areas. This had impacts on women, including food scarcity and malnutrition, displacement and vulnerability to trafficking, which is also a form of violence against women.

- **In 2016**, WLB's briefing paper, *Access to Justice for Women Survivors of Gender-Based Violence* committed by state actors in Burma, documented 15 cases in 2015 and three in 2016 involving junta-perpetrated violence. Despite the semi-democratic transition, military impunity persisted, rooted in the institutional protections of the 2008 Constitution.

Additional concerns for women and ethnic communities noted in the report were arbitrary taxation and extortion of local people by the regime, as well as the proposed mega-dam on the Salween River near the Tasang crossing between Murng Pan and Murng Ton in southern Shan State. The impacts of the SPDC from 1997 to 2011 rendered basic social services, such as reproductive health care and education, nearly impossible to access, while deeply entrenching families into irreversible levels of poverty.

- **In 2017**, WLB published *Girls Bear the Shame* to address the stigma faced by young survivors of sexual violence. The report condemned authorities for mishandling child-rape cases in the name of preserving local "peace," particularly in ethnic and conflict-affected areas where girls face heightened risks. The consistent failure of successive governments to uphold protections for women and children reflects a broader disregard for their rights and for international conventions meant to protect them.
- **In 2021**, WLB published the report 'Barriers at Every Turn,' which included cases of GBV in Burma/Myanmar between 2017 and 2020. The documentation period was significant as it included cases following the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party. Despite initial optimism for the democratic party under Daw Aung San Suu Kyi during her first term, ethnic women in Burma did not see enhanced security or safety, contrary to the promises to improve their situation.

The increase in GBV was made worse by the lockdown provisions initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic, where many of the perpetrators were teachers, village administrations and family members, in addition to soldiers patrolling in the vicinity.

- **In 2024**, WLB released a Humanitarian Crisis Report covering the period from 2021 to 2024, highlighting the primary causes of violence that contributed to the displacement crisis that has worsened since the failed coup in Burma/Myanmar.

Displaced women and girls face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, primarily due to limited access to healthcare and legal protection. The lack of sexual and reproductive health services contributes to serious maternal health issues, including miscarriages and pregnancy-related hypertension. These challenges are further compounded by food insecurity, which often forces women to sacrifice their own nutrition to provide for their families.

Further, the displacement crisis has hindered the types of social service providers available, especially with domestic rates of violence on the rise. Overall, the gendered impacts of the displacement crisis have led to distressing circumstances, including inadequate access to facilities for physical and mental health treatment.

The report concluded with calls for urgent protections to meet the unmet needs of the millions displaced across the country, and where women and girls face gender-specific threats to their safety and security.

- **In 2024**, WLB released another report: *Building The Triple Resistance: Women Leaders' Perceptions of Changes and Challenges a Year and a Half After the Coup in Burma*. This report focused on the perceptions of the failed coup and challenges that followed from the perspective of women human rights defenders.

WLB interviewed 21 women for the report from 12 women's organizations across 10 states and regions. The testimonies in the report primarily dealt with forced displacement as one of the most significant hurdles to overcome amid ongoing safety concerns. For women's human rights defenders in particular, they were consistently having to flee to new locations. Some women were separated from their immediate family in the process.

The anxiety and anguish from these conditions led to increased pressure on their mental health, including concerns over their physical safety, separation from families and security concerns. On top of this, balancing workload while fleeing and coping with the trauma they had endured in the process was recognized as being extremely difficult.



One woman human rights defender stated: "It is inconvenient for me to climb a mountain to participate in an online meeting in the late evening or at night. Also, it is forbidden to leave the IDP camps, according to the rules."

WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA

The Women's League of Burma is an umbrella organization comprising 12 women's organizations of different ethnic and political backgrounds. WLB was founded on 9 December 1999.

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