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DEADLY ENCOUNTERS:

Killings of civilians by armed actors in Southeast Burma
(October 2022 - April 2023)

Briefing Paper

June 8th, 2023 / KHRG # 23-2-BP1



KHRG

Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

1. Introduction

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“If they shoot anyone they see [on sight] like this, all villagers will be gone.”

Testimony of Saw N---, a 51-year-old villager from O--- village, Kaw Nweh village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District.¹

Since the 2021 coup², the human rights and security situation in locally-defined Karen State³ has worsened, with reports of violations committed by the State Administration Council (SAC)⁴ increasing in the region, including air strikes, indiscriminate shelling, burning of civilian properties, arbitrary arrests, torture and deprivation of humanitarian aid. Killing cases are also regularly reported to KHRG across all seven districts in its operation area, with at least 45 cases of killings reported between January 2022 and April 2023. Of these, 22 took place in

the past few months, between October 2022 and April 2023. The actual number of killing incidents is likely much higher than this.

This briefing paper took as its subject of analysis 14 cases of killings of civilians by armed groups across Karen State, committed between October 2022 and April 2023, underlining their deep impact on the communities regarding villagers’ safety and livelihood. Of the cases analysed for this briefing paper, 11 incidents were perpetrated by the SAC and its allied forces, and three were committed by local resistance armed groups. This paper provides a contextual and historical overview of the unsafe situation in Southeast Burma. It then shows evidence and patterns of killing incidents faced by villagers, in particular when encountering soldiers while travelling. It concludes with a security and legal analysis of the situation in the region, and ends with a set of policy recommendations for stakeholders.

2. Contextual overview: Decades of abuses, renewed since 2021

The 2021 coup, staged by the State Administration Council (SAC), provoked a storm of pro-democracy protests throughout the country in opposition to the regime, known locally as the Spring Revolution, and escalated the civil war between the military and local ethnic armed organisations throughout Burma. Early peaceful pro-democracy protests and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)⁵ began in the cities, especially in Yangon, with the goal to restore the civilian government. The military responded violently to the peaceful protests: at least 3,520 civilians who joined the pro-democracy movement have been killed by the military junta since the coup, with the exact number likely to be much higher, according to Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP).⁶ Many people supporting anti-coup efforts in Burma, especially CDM and National League for Democracy (NLD)⁷ members, have fled to territories under the control of ethnic armed groups like Karen State,⁸ after the Karen National Union (KNU)⁹ released, in the early days after the coup, their position rejecting the military

junta and providing help and protection for all civilians who sought safety.¹⁰

Human rights violations in Southeast Burma, however, did not start with the 2021 coup. They are closely linked with military policies adopted by the Burma Army as early as the 1960s, and with the impunity enjoyed by their military leaders for past violations. One of those policies, the “four cuts” strategy, aimed to target civilians and sever alleged ties between ethnic armed groups and local communities, by cutting off their access to food, funds, intelligence, and recruits. Shoot-on-sight policies were also adopted by the military in ethnic states. Such policies led to countless human rights violations over the past 70 years, causing widespread fear among the civilian population. In 1994, Naw P---, a 27-year-old female villager from Hpa-an District, told KHRG:

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“Now I’m still afraid. I never want to see SLORC¹¹ [Burma Army] soldiers

*again. If I hear of them, I'll run away. If we don't run, they shoot us, and if we run, they also shoot at us. The soldiers said: 'Don't run away' but then they shot at us, so we must run to escape.'*¹²

In such an atmosphere of terror and hostility, where any contact with Burma Army soldiers was potentially fatal, civilians lived in constant fear for their lives. 30 years later, and in particular after the 2021 coup, soldiers continue to shoot at villagers following the same patterns as in the past, leading to a resurgence of killing cases.

3. Factual summary: Deliberate killings of civilians

This chapter presents incidents of killings of civilians by the SAC from October 2022 to April 2023, documented by KHRG in its operational area. Three patterns can be identified in the incidents: KHRG data shows that Burma Army soldiers killed villagers by (1) shooting them on sight; (2) chasing the villagers that were fleeing these encounters and murdering them; or by (3) halting civilians they encountered, before arresting, torturing and killing them. Local resistance armed groups have also committed killings of civilians, reportedly.

A. "Shoot on sight" policy

Since the 2021 coup, villagers in Southeast Burma risk being targeted by SAC soldiers whenever they move. Out of the 14 incidents documented between October 2022 and April 2023 analysed for this report, six incidents involved male villagers who were shot on sight, and killed, as they were on their way to support their families' livelihood. One incident of shooting-on-sight took place in Doo Tha Htoo District, one in Taw Oo District, one in Kler Lwee Htoo District, one in Mu Traw District, and two incidents took place in Dooplaya District.

For instance, on March 24th 2023, during a patrolling mission, ten SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)¹³ #8 soldiers from Bilin Town, led by Lance Sergeant Moe Zaw, kept guard for their troop's security beside a road in Q--- village, Daw Ya village tract, Tha Htoo Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. At about 11:30 am, two villagers, aged 18, were travelling by foot to work on construction in the village, when they encountered the SAC troops patrolling. When the SAC soldiers from IB #8 saw the villagers, they shot and killed both of them on the road.¹⁴



This photo shows the corpses of the two villagers who were shot and killed by SAC IB #8 soldiers on Q--- road, Q--- village, Daw Ya Village Tract, Tha Htoo Township, Doo Tha Htoo District on March 24th 2023, at about 11:30 am. [Photo: KHRG]

On December 31st 2022, at around 7 am, the Northern Thandaung Aye Chan Yay Armed Group¹⁵ attacked the SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)¹⁶ #413 at Hton Bo Gyi army camp, located near A--- village, Baw Saw Law area, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. An hour after the fighting, at around 8:30 am, Saw Aung Thu Ya Than, a local villager from Leik Tho Town, unaware of the clash, was travelling to Toungoo Town with his motorbike to buy food for his family to celebrate New Year's Day [under the Gregorian calendar]. Before he crossed an SAC checkpoint, the SAC soldiers posted there hid nearby. As witnessed by local villagers, when the villager had already passed the checkpoint, the SAC soldiers fatally shot him in the back. The victim's family did not receive any compensation for this arbitrary killing. Instead, the SAC forced them to pay a fee to retrieve the villager's body and his motorbike.¹⁷ In Dooplaya District, one incident took place on

April 3rd 2023, at 10:00 am, when SAC soldiers temporarily based in the monastery in Cb--- village, Aww Hpa Kyi village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, shot and killed a villager beside the monastery, as he was on his way to Kawkareik Town.¹⁸ Another incident took place on April 24th 2023, at 11:00 pm, on Kyainseikyi Town Road, Kyainseikyi Township, when the SAC IB #32 shot and killed a 28-year-old Muslim villager named K---. The villager was living in the Noh Poe refugee camp, located in Thailand's Tak province, but had left the camp at 8:00 pm to go to Kyainseikyi Town for a visit.¹⁹

On the morning of October 22nd 2022, after a fight broke out with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)²⁰ at R--- place, S--- village, T'Hkaw Pwa village tract, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, a woman was shot and killed by an SAC battalion [unknown number]. The villager had been sick and was unable to flee fast enough, so the soldiers reached her. After killing her, the SAC soldiers also looted her money and jewellery.²¹

In Mu Traw District, on February 7th 2023, at 4:30 pm, SAC soldiers from IB #349, based at Hpah Ghaw Loh army camp, Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, shot at Saw W--- and Saw H---, from Y--- village, Saw Muh Plaw village tract. The two villagers were on their way back home after hunting in the forest at A--- [place] to feed their families. Two bullets hit 28-year-old Saw W--- and penetrated his head, killing him on the spot. Saw H--- fled the shooting by crawling silently among the bushes, before running away. He was fired at by the SAC soldiers again, but was able to escape. Villagers went to the incident place the next day and brought back Saw W---'s corpse to their hiding site in E--- area. Saw H--- recalled:

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“When I heard the sound of gunfire, he [the victim] fell down next to me. He laid on my chest and [was] bleeding. I looked at him, he was not breathing. I crawled among the dense bushes and the SAC soldiers chased me from behind. I could not run as the bushes were so dense. I got [out] from the bushes slowly [...]. Then, the SAC soldiers stopped

firing. Then, the SAC soldiers fired a few more [rounds]. After that, I went down to the stream and went up to the mountain.”²²



The photo was taken on February 8th 2023 at a displacement site in Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District, where Y--- villagers displaced to. It shows Saw W---'s corpse after he was killed by SAC soldiers while hunting in a nearby forest.

[Photo: KHRG]

The cases mentioned above show the SAC's practice of shooting villagers on sight. Since the coup, the SAC is by default hostile to anyone they encounter travelling in Southeast Burma, and hence villagers face serious risks to their lives. When villagers face SAC soldiers on the road, fleeing and running away often appears to be their only option, even though SAC soldiers do not hesitate to shoot fugitives.

B. Shooting of fugitives

As illustrated above, SAC soldiers often kill villagers whenever they see them. Many villagers, therefore, choose to flee as fast as they can whenever they see the SAC, fearing arrest, detention, torture, disappearance and killing. Although posing a risk to their lives, this strategy sometimes allows villagers to escape. For this reason, many villagers reported that they flee when they see SAC soldiers. For instance, on January 13th 2023, the SAC based in Wa Ma village marched to Wah Ma Hkee village, Wah Ma village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Doolaya District. The soldiers broke villagers' doors, entered their

houses, searched their properties and looted the villagers' chickens. On the same day, fighting broke out between the SAC and the KNLA in T--- village, Wah Ma village tract. After the fighting, two villagers encountered the SAC, who ordered them to stop on the road. As the villagers did not stop, the SAC shot and arrested them. Villagers assumed that the two villagers were tortured and killed.²³

In another case, on March 12th 2023, the SAC Light Infantry Division (LID)²⁴ #77, IB #598 and #589 combined forces marched to four village tracts in Hsaw Htee Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, in the KNU-controlled territory. On March 13th 2023, at around 10 am, the SAC troops entered Bb--- village, where they encountered three local villagers driving on a motorbike on the road. The villagers were coming from an internally displaced persons (IDPs) site to check their homes and to get some food for the KNLA. When they saw the SAC, the villagers stopped the motorbike immediately and ran, while the SAC soldiers shot at them. One of the villagers, Saw V---, was hit and the other two escaped. According to the two survivors, Saw V--- did not die on the spot when hit, as they heard him cry for help. However, the two villagers were too afraid to return and help him due to the SAC troops' presence. The SAC troops camped in Bb--- village for two days. On March 15th 2023, villagers retrieved the corpse of Saw V---, and saw wounds on his back and injuries in his head and brain. His clothes had also been changed to a KNLA soldier uniform that was too small for him. The local authorities and villagers assumed that after he got wounded on his back, the SAC shot and killed him, and then changed his clothes. Due to this incident, Saw V---'s family members and other Bb--- villagers had to flee outside of the village. A local villager explained to KHRG:

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“The SAC did it [change clothes to a KNLA uniform] in order to claim that this villager was a KNLA soldier, and they could get credit for killing one KNLA soldier and report it to their upper leader. The SAC did it to claim he [Saw V---] is [a soldier] from the KNLA, and not a villager.”²⁵

In Mergui-Tavoy District, on October 17th 2022, a 40-year-old villager named U X---, from Z--- village, Ler K' Saw Township, was shot and killed by the SAC as he was travelling with his son to buy a generator in Bokeyyin Town, to support his family's livelihood. The SAC soldiers who guarded the road ordered them to stop, but they were scared of the SAC, so they ran away. The SAC soldiers then shot at them. His son survived, but since he got hit in his back and elbow, he had to get medical treatment.

All these incidents show the constant feeling of fear prevalent among villagers in Karen State, caused by increased and indiscriminate SAC attacks. Any encounter with SAC soldiers can be fatal, so villagers run away when they meet SAC soldiers on the road. High militarisation and harmful military policies abovementioned, such as the four cuts, might encourage SAC soldiers to open fire on fleeing villagers, with no regard for human life. Many times, villagers are just shot on sight by SAC for no apparent reason.

C. Torture and killing after arrest

Villagers know from decades of experience that meeting with the SAC often leads to arrests, torture, detention, and death. For instance, on October 15th 2022, fighting broke out between about 200 SAC soldiers and KNLA Battalion #3, Company #1, as the SAC entered Pyin Ka Do Kon village tract, Kyeh Htoh Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. On October 21st, a combination of several SAC troops of about 100 soldiers entered I--- village, Pyin Ka Do Kon village tract and looted villagers' properties, and burned nine villagers' houses, including U J---'s house. Before the SAC troops arrived, all I--- villagers fled, but U J--- decided to return to the village to look after his house and other properties, after taking his children to a safe place. He encountered these SAC troops just before he arrived in his village. The SAC arrested him, tortured him and then killed him next to his house. After the SAC left I--- village, the village head returned to the village through the forest to look for U J---. The village head saw the corpse of U J--- near his house. His head had been blown apart, which villagers assumed was done by a gunshot.²⁶



This photo was taken in I--- village, Pyin Ka Do Kon village tract, Kyaikto Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. This photo shows the corpse of U J---, who was killed by SAC soldiers. KHRG received this photo on December 10th 2022. *[Photo: Local villager]*

In Taw Oo District, two villagers from L--- village, Per Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, were going to look for turmeric in another village on April 7th 2023. The two villagers encountered SAC LID #22 soldiers on the way, who arrested them for unknown reasons. When local villagers learned that the two villagers had disappeared, they searched for them and found their corpses on April 16th 2023. Villagers reported that the two victims were not wearing military uniforms when they left the village, but when they saw their corpses, one of them was in a soldier uniform, and their hands were tied behind their backs with nylon strings.²⁷

D. Killings by local armed resistance groups

The 2021 coup resulted in increased militarisation in Southeast Burma, including the formation of new armed groups, which has created a more unsafe environment for villagers. Villagers do not only have to be constantly afraid of being killed by SAC troops, but also of being killed by local armed groups that operate in the communities if suspected of being spies. For instance, on February 2nd 2023, the local People Defence Force (PDF)²⁸ troops came to M--- village, M'No Ro area, Ler K'Hsaw Township, Mergui-Tavoy District and arrested three villagers including the M--- village administrator, and took the three villagers with them, accusing them of being SAC spies. They released the two villagers, but not the village administrator. The M--- village administrator was U F---, a 70-year-old elder. The PDF troops killed him while detained. Villagers found his corpse on the morning of February 5th 2023.²⁹ Although less common than SAC attacks, killings of civilians by local armed groups constitute human rights violations, are illegal under the law of armed conflict, and worsen the security context of villagers in Karen State.



This photo was taken on April 19th 2023 in Ee--- area, Per Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District. This photo shows the corpse of two villagers that were shot and killed by SAC LID #22 on April 7th 2023. *[Photo: Local villager]*

4. Analysis: impacts on villagers' lives and violations of international law and standards

In a context where villagers are facing violent attacks from SAC soldiers, every encounter with them could be fatal. Killings in Southeast Burma usually follow a pattern: during or following military activities, the SAC soldiers come across villagers in nearby areas and kill them. For this reason, villagers try to avoid meeting with SAC soldiers but, in many instances, villagers cannot avoid these encounters because they are caught by surprise by the arrival of the soldiers near their village, or because they meet them on the road. The SAC then arrests, detains, tortures, disappears and kills villagers. If villagers flee to avoid such deadly encounters, they are usually shot at.

This Burma Army practice of attacking civilians in Karen State is not something new. As explained above, it is linked to harmful ideologies prevailing through the Burma Army, picturing villagers as potential enemies due, in part, to perceived links or alignment with resistance groups. These ideologies fuel the Burma Army's "four cuts" strategy and shoot-on-sight policies, still enforced in Karen State today. Decades of such human rights violations have generated widespread terror and traumatised communities. This context of fear, increased militarisation, and constant suspicion generates tension in the region, also tied to cases of local armed resistance groups killing civilians suspected to be SAC informants.

The SAC practice of killing civilians on sight impacts villagers' security and lives. Cultivating and working in a field, travelling to town to buy items, or any other ordinary activities of villagers' daily lives becomes a dangerous exercise; any road can become a trap, and even remaining in their village can be deadly. This creates a deep fear for villagers in Southeast Burma, specifically towards the SAC. This fear makes it harder for them to go and work on their farmlands to secure their livelihood, particularly while the SAC is present in the area, or after a member of the community has been killed. If villagers are not able to work on their farmlands, go to the market to sell and buy essential products, or commute to their place of work and earn money, their livelihoods are also threatened. The SAC often

targets male villagers: of all incidents analysed for this report, all but one of the killings reported to KHRG concerned male villagers. Therefore, the families of victims are also deeply impacted by fear and livelihood insecurity after the death of the main breadwinner.

Faced with these human rights violations, villagers utilise avoidance strategies, which have been used for decades in Southeast Burma. The SAC is continually arresting, torturing and killing civilians in rural communities, so villagers evade these abuses by fleeing right after they receive information about SAC presence in or near their communities, and by running for their lives when they see SAC troops on the way. As mentioned above, they do so at great risk to their lives.

The killings of civilians violate international law. The 'right to life' is one of the most fundamental of all human rights, found in the third article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and essential to accomplish 'human dignity', set out in the very first article of the Declaration. All authorities have a duty to respect it, protect it, and fulfil it. Life is not protected only in times of peace, but also in times of war, since murder is prohibited according to the 89th rule of customary International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The targeting of civilians is also forbidden by the very first customary rule of IHL, while acts of violence made to terrorise the civilian population are prohibited by its second rule. The SAC is moreover trying to conceal that it kills civilians, by disguising the bodies with military uniforms or by disappearing the victims. The way in which the SAC kills civilians is against the 87th rule of customary IHL, which requires treating people humanly.

The grave breach of such fundamental prohibitions constitutes war crimes and, if committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population, the act of murder is also a crime against humanity. Furthermore, the consequences that killings and the climate of fear have on the livelihood of villagers are compromising numerous other rights, such as the right to food, the right to

security of person, or the right to an adequate standard of living. Torture is also prohibited in all the bodies of international law, to the point that it constitutes an *ius cogens* rule, which applies at all times and in all situations.

As evidenced by the incidents being continuously documented by KHRG, the security and human rights situation in Southeast Burma has continued to worsen since the 2021 coup. In particular, a constantly high number of cases of killings of villagers have been reported to KHRG throughout 2022 and 2023. Urgent action needs to be taken

in order to immediately protect civilians in Burma, as the SAC systematically targets and kills civilians, in blatant disregard for human life and international laws and standards. Moreover, the longer time the SAC enjoys impunity for their attacks, the more the situation in Karen State will worsen, leading to further violations, terror and insecurity. In turn, this will mean heavier, deeper impacts for communities and further help needed to accomplish peace, welfare and justice for ethnic villagers in rural Burma.

5. Recommendations

For international stakeholders, NGOs, and regional and foreign governments:

- Acknowledge the grave crimes committed by the military junta and refrain from supporting it or granting it legitimacy, including by signing agreements with it, presenting it with credentials, and inviting its leaders to international forums and functions.
- Support local civil society, community-based organisations (CSO/CBOs) and ethnic service providers that prioritise human rights, including by working with them to develop support systems for victims of violations, including for the relatives of villagers killed, arrested and tortured by SAC soldiers and other local armed groups.
- Support efforts to hold the Burma military accountable for its vast array of crimes in impartial and independent courts, including the International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ), and national courts in countries with universal jurisdiction laws.
- Broaden the scope of accountability of international investigations to include crimes committed against Karen peoples, not yet covered by current proceedings.
- Support coordinated and targeted sanctions against junta officials suspected of being responsible for carrying out international crimes and other serious violations of international law.

For armed groups:

- Give orders to the soldiers to end their attacks on civilians and abide by human rights and international humanitarian law, and make sure that those orders are respected at all times.
- Respect the exercise of the right to life, including by ending the arresting, torturing, and killing of civilians and by protecting their livelihood.

Photos note: front cover

This photo was taken in October 2022 at Thaw Kwaw Day place, T'Hkaw Pwa village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. This photo shows the grave of Naw Day Nyah, a 48-year-old villager who was shot and killed at her farm hut by an unidentified Battalion of the SAC from Taw Oo District on October 22nd 2022, at 7:00 am. *[Photo: KHRG]*

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Burma. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrg.org.

Endnotes

¹ Unpublished raw data from March 20th 2023.

² On February 1st 2021, the Burma Army deposed the democratically elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD), transferred power to Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed Forces, and invalidated the NLD's landslide victory in the November 2020 General Election.

³ Karen State, or Kaw Thoo Lei, as defined by the Karen National Union (KNU), covers Kayin State, Tanintharyi Region and parts of Mon State and Bago Region. The KNU uses different boundaries and location names for the areas under its control, dividing Karen State into seven districts. Karen State, located in Southeast Burma, is primarily inhabited by ethnic Karen people. Most of the Karen population resides in the largely rural areas of Southeast Burma, living alongside other ethnic groups, including Bamar, Shan, Mon and Pa'Oh.

⁴ The State Administration Council (SAC) is the executive governing body created in the aftermath of the February 1st 2021 military coup. It was established by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on February 2nd 2021, and is composed of eight military officers and eight civilians. The chairperson serves as the de facto head of government of Burma/Myanmar and leads the Military Cabinet of Myanmar, the executive branch of the government. Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of SAC chairperson following the coup.

⁵ On February 2nd 2021, healthcare workers at state-run hospitals and medical facilities across Myanmar spearheaded what is being referred to as a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) consisting of labour strikes in protest against the February 1st 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to include civil servants from all sectors of the government who are walking off their jobs as a way of non-recognition and non-participation in the military regime. Because of the popularity of the movement, and its seminal role in wider protests across the country, some people have begun using it as a catch-all phrase to include other protest forms like boycotts and pot-banging. On February 2nd 2021, healthcare workers across Myanmar spearheaded a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and initiated labour strikes to protest against the February 1st 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to other branches of public service, eventually turning into a nationwide, large-scale civil disobedience campaign.

⁶ See: aappb.org/?lang=en

⁷ The National League for Democracy (NLD) is the political party that governed Burma/Myanmar from 2016 to January 2021. Led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD won landslide victories in the 2015 and 2020 General Elections.

⁸ The NLD government was deposed by the Burma Army in the February 2021 Myanmar coup d'état, after which elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

⁹ KHRG, "[Military Atrocities and Civilian Resilience: Testimonies of injustice, insecurity and violence in Southeast Myanmar during the 2021 coup](#)", November 2021.

¹⁰ The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

¹¹ Burma News International, "[KNU Offer Anti-Coup Protestors' Its Protection](#)", February 2021.

¹² The State Law and Order Restoration Council, which replaced the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) following the September 18th 1988 coup d'état by then General Saw Maung (later Senior General). The SLORC was officially dissolved in 1997 by Senior General Than Shwe and was replaced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

¹³ KHRG, "[SLORC Shootings & Arrests of Refugees](#)", January 1995.

¹⁴ An Infantry Battalion (IB) of the Burma Army comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Yet up-to-date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

¹⁵ Unpublished raw data from March 31st 2023.

¹⁶ Aye Chan Yay A'pweh, which translates as 'Peace Group', is a (former) government-sponsored militia first formed in 1998, led by U Ko Gyi. It is sometimes referred to as the Northern Thandaung Aye Chan Yay A'Pweh. It has operated mainly out of a base in the upper region of the Kyaung Haung area in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District near the Karenni State border, but there are also small camps in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. The group previously made a peace agreement with the Tatmadaw in 1998, but since the 2021 military coup, it has engaged in armed conflict with the military junta.

¹⁷ A Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Yet up-to-date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

¹⁸ KHRG, "[Taw Oo District Incident Report: A villager died after he was shot by SAC troops in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, December 2022](#)", January 2023.

¹⁹ Unpublished raw data from April 6th 2023.

²⁰ Unpublished raw data from April 24th 2023.

²¹ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

²² Unpublished raw data from October 2022.

²³ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: A villager was fatally shot by SAC soldiers while hunting in the forest, February 2023](#)", April 2023.

²⁴ Unpublished raw data from January 25th 2023.

²⁵ A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw is commanded by a brigadier general, and consists of ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Tatmadaw in 1966. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, three battalions each and one reserve, one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units. Each division is directly under the command of the Chief of Staff (Army).

²⁶ Unpublished raw data from March 29th 2023.

²⁷ Unpublished raw data from January 12th 2023.

²⁸ Unpublished raw data from April 28th 2023.

²⁹ The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the February 1st 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Burma/Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

³⁰ Unpublished raw data from March 9th 2023.