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Junta burns nearly 5,000 homes in a month, Myanmar's shadow government says

A series of brutal arson attacks across Myanmar destroyed 4,807 homes and burned 23 people to death, according to the shadow National Unity Government.

Its Ministry of Interior and Immigration and Fire Brigade Department said Wednesday there were 138 arson attacks by junta troops across the country in January.

Sagaing region was hardest hit with 4,271 houses burned, killing 17 locals. Arson attacks also destroyed 10 religious buildings and a school, the statement said.

In Magway region, 357 houses and one religious building were destroyed.

More than 50 homes were destroyed in Kayin state and Mandalay and over 30 in Tanintharyi region.

Arson attacks in Mon, Rakhine and Chin states were in single figures but six locals were burned to death in Chin.

The figures were compiled from reports by organizations in the field and releases from civil society groups, the statement said.

A woman from Sagaing region's Khin-U township said troops burned homes even though there was no resistance from villagers and no pro-democracy militias in the area.

"The brutality of the junta army is beyond words," said the woman who refused to be named for safety reasons.

"They entered the village without fighting. They torched the houses until they were satisfied and left the village. I can't understand why they are so cruel to the people."

Residents said the most brutal troops are from Infantry Battalions 361, 368 and 369, blaming them for a series of human rights abuses in Sagaing region.

The junta claims the arson attacks were carried out by People's Defense Forces. A statement on Jan. 24 said 1,122 houses in 22 villages in Sagaing regions and Kachin state to the northeast were destroyed in 23 attacks by National Unity Government People's Defense Force troops in the final two months of 2022.

Nearly 800,000 Sagaing residents have been left homeless by attacks in the past two years – 15% of its population, according to the independent Institute for Strategy and Policy (Myanmar). It said last month, more than 43,000 buildings were burned down since the military seized power from the democratically elected National Unity Government in a February 2021 coup.

Translated by RFA Burmese. Edited by Mike Firn.

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