



KACHIN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION THAILAND

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Urgent update by the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)

Burma Army commits war crimes against Kachin IDPs: blocking access to refuge, using as human shields and minesweepers, indiscriminate shelling, looting

Contrary to claims by Burma Army commanders that they have not targeted civilians in their recent offensives against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), interviews by KWAT with IDPs reveal that in April 2018 Burma Army troops committed war crimes against villagers in three townships in Kachin State: Hpakant, Danai and Injangyang. This includes: blocking IDPs from accessing refuge; using IDPs as human shields and minesweepers; indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombing of civilian areas; looting and destruction of property.

Villagers rescued from Lai Nawng Khu, Hpakant township, on May 6 and 7, have given terrifying accounts of how 152 people, including 64 children, were blocked when fleeing through the jungle by Burma Army troops of LIB 424, who then used them as human shields and minesweepers. They were made to trek through the jungle single file, interspersed with Burmese troops, causing a villager in front to be injured by a land mine. After being forced to stay near a military base for four days, they were forced back to their village, where they camped in the village church for 17 days, while the troops stayed in their homes, looting their food and property, and wearing villagers' clothes to ward off KIA attacks. Before being released, the IDPs were told by the Burma Army not to stay in IDP camps.

About 2,000 civilians from in and around Awng Lawt village, Danai township, starting fleeing to the jungle on April 11, after 105 mm shells were fired indiscriminately from the Danai Regional Operations Command (20 kilometers to the west) and two jets dropped bombs on the area. Shells killed two civilians and injured an elderly farmer. As hundreds of troops of Battalions 86, 238, 318 and 101 seized the area, IDPs tried to trek to safety through the dense jungle. Several groups of IDPs have been rescued, some after a month in hiding, but about 130 – mostly elderly and disabled – remain trapped in the jungle.

In Injangyang township, where hundreds of Burma Army reinforcements from ID 33 and 88 arrived on April 24, and launched attacks on April 26, about 600 IDPs were blocked from fleeing south to Myitkyina on April 27. They were forced to take shelter in churches in Injangyang town. On May 14, community leaders were still negotiating with the Burma Army for safe passage out of the area.

KWAT urges the Burma Army to immediately stop their offensives in all ethnic areas, and stop committing war crimes against civilians, so that inclusive political dialogue can begin towards democratic federal reform.

International pressure is urgently needed to protect civilians in Burma's war zones. KWAT therefore urges foreign governments:

1. To publicly condemn the Burma Army offensives and war crimes against the ethnic peoples
2. To withhold funding for the peace process until the Burma Army stops its offensives and war crimes against the ethnic peoples
3. To stop any military to military engagement with the Burma Army
4. To suspend economic engagement with Burma until the Burmese government holds their army to account for their war crimes, and brings an end to all military offensives against the ethnic peoples
5. To provide humanitarian aid cross-border to displaced communities in the ethnic conflict zones

Details of Burma Army war crimes documented by KWAT

1. Burma Army blocked IDPs fleeing from Lai Nawng Khu village, Hpakant township, used them as human shields and minesweepers, looted property

Lai Nawng Khu village is in southeast Hpakant township. Most of the villagers are farmers. The KIA used to have a base about one mile away from the village.

On April 10, 2018, the Lai Nawng Khu villagers were warned by the KIA that the Burma Army was approaching. On April 11, all the villagers fled their homes and began moving through the jungle towards Kamaing. After two nights in the jungle, on April 13, they met a Burma Army column from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 424.

The Burma Army troops searched all the villagers and took away their mobile phones. At that time there were 152 villagers, including 64 children, 11 elderly people and 3 pregnant women. The villagers were then interrogated and asked questions such as: Are there KIA soldiers with you? What is the layout of your village and how far away is the KIA post? How often did the KIA come to your village? How many KIA soldiers were posted near your village?

Five male villagers were taken apart from the group for interrogation. They were threatened with knives, beaten in the back and slapped.

The troops then forced the villagers to walk with them through the jungle, single file, interspersed with the soldiers, and with villagers leading in front. The troops used a drone to monitor security as they walked.

They walked for several miles, until it started to rain. The troops then stopped the group, and ordered the villagers to cut bamboo, fetch water, and prepare food for everyone. They were also ordered to start preparing shelters, but then suddenly, they were ordered to start moving again.

That night at about 7 pm, one of the villagers forced to walk ahead of the group, a villager called Po Shan, was injured by a land mine. Villagers saw him being carried away, suspended in a blanket on a pole. It is not known if he survived.

After walking the whole night, they reached a place where there were vehicles. They were ordered to get into trucks and cars, and then were driven to some fields near Chaung Wa village. They arrived there at about 5 am on April 14.

In the fields, the villagers were separated into two groups: men in one group, and women and children in another group. This caused great fear among each group, worrying what would happen to the other group. At that time, the villagers were being guarded by Burma Army troops from Battalions 424 and 225, and a local government militia.

Some of the village leaders were taken to meet with Burma Army officers in a military camp about half a kilometer away. The Battalion 424 deputy commander told them they were not allowed to become IDPs, and must not stay in an IDP camp. They were told they must return to their village, which had been “cleaned”.

The villagers slept four nights in the field, and then were forced to return back to their village, even though they did not want to go there.

At 2 pm on April 18, the Burma Army brought trucks to the field, and the villagers were ordered into three trucks. The trucks carrying civilians drove between three other trucks carrying Burma Army troops. The trucks drove them to near a government militia camp, and then they were made to start walking. That night they stopped at a farm, cooked dinner and slept there. At 8 am they started walking again for about two miles towards their village. The villagers were made to walk in front, and about 30 Burma Army troops walked behind them. They used a drone to monitor security the whole time.

On April 19, when the villagers arrived back at Lai Nawng Khu, they found about 50 soldiers of LIB 424 already based there. They saw “hka-ma-ya (LIB) 424” spray painted around the village, including on the church signboard.

When they arrived, the Burma Army troops gave water and packs of food to the villagers at the entrance of the village, and took photos of this. In fact, the rice in the packs was not cooked properly and was inedible.

The soldiers told the villagers they would not harm them, but they were too afraid to stay in their own houses, and decided to stay together in the village church. The Burma Army troops stayed in the villagers’ houses. They looted the villagers’ rice and livestock to eat for themselves. Some also wore the villagers’ clothes instead of their uniforms. Villagers saw that they also placed KIA uniforms in each of the houses.

One day, one of the young male villagers was called out of the church and forced to put on a KIA uniform. He was taken into the forest and his photo taken in the uniform. Then he was allowed to return to the church.

On May 6, some government officials came and took 20 of the villagers to Kamaing. On May 7, they came and took most of the remaining villagers to Kamaing. Only two families decided to stay in Lai Nawng Khu.

2. Indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombing by Burma Army of Awng Lawt village, Danai township

Awng Lawt is located about 20 kilometers east of the Danai town, upstream along the Danai river. There are about 400 houses in Awng Lawt. Local villagers mostly work as farmers, traders or gold miners. The KIA's Brigade 2 headquarters was situated about half a mile east of Awng Lawt.

On April 11, at about 1 pm, the Burma Army Regional Operations Command in Danai began firing 105 mm mortar shells towards Awng Lawt, and two aircraft flew over Awng Lawt, dropping bombs. A villager called Kayin La was killed by a shell that landed in a stream near the village. A farmer called Npawp Yaw Han trying to round up his cows in nearby fields after the bombing, went back to Awng Lawt to fetch his 21-year-old son to help him. However, at about 3 pm, the Burma Army fired mortar shells again from Danai. A shell exploded as he and his son were bringing their cows close to the village. His son, Npawp Naw Ring, was killed instantly, and he was injured in the leg.

Villagers from Awng Lawt fled to take shelter outside the village. Meanwhile, Burma Army troops had started ground attacks at nearby villages of Sut Ra and Sut Ring, so villagers fled east to Awng Lawt. Some Burma Army troops in civilian clothes were already in place in Sut Ra, pretending to be oil sellers, and joined the attacks against the KIA.

Villagers from Sut Ra and Sut Ring spent the night in the Kachin Baptist Convention compound in Awng Lawt, and the next morning joined other civilians hiding outside Awng Lawt.

Hundreds of IDPs slowly tried to escape to safety through the jungle. During that time two pregnant women gave birth. On April 30, the IDPs separated into three groups. About 300 able-bodied IDPs took a route south along Maji mountain. The remaining 260 villagers, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, and elderly, who could not manage this difficult mountainous route, took the route along the Hkamau stream and the Dabi stream, trying to reach Danai town. About 80 villagers, including disabled, very elderly, newborn babies and their carers, stayed behind, some of them planning to slowly catch up with the others.

The group of 300 IDPs reached near Dum Bang village on May 8, from where they were taken to Myitkyina. The group of 260 IDPs reached Danai town on May 9, where most of them took shelter in a church compound. Contact has been lost with the 80 IDPs who stayed behind, as well as about 50 IDPs from Maji Bum village who fled Burma Army attacks on May 10, and there are grave concerns for their safety.

3. Burma Army blocked IDPs from fleeing in Injangyang township

On April 24, 2018, villagers saw hundreds of Burma Army troops (from Infantry Divisions 33 and 88) arriving in 16 army trucks from Myitkyina through the 16 Mile checkpoint at Zup Mai Yang, Injangyang township. Therefore, on April 25, hundreds of civilians from villages in Injangyang started fleeing towards Myitkyina. On April 26, the Burma Army launched attacks against a KIA base about two miles from Injangyang town.

On April 27, Burma Army troops from IB 21 started blocking villagers from fleeing through the 16 Mile checkpoint, and ordered them to return back home. The villagers therefore returned to Injangyang town and took shelter in the Roman Catholic and Baptist church compounds there. On May 13, there were still 617 villagers trapped there, including 297 women and girls. Community leaders have been trying to negotiate with the Burma Army to get permission to go and rescue them.

For More Information:

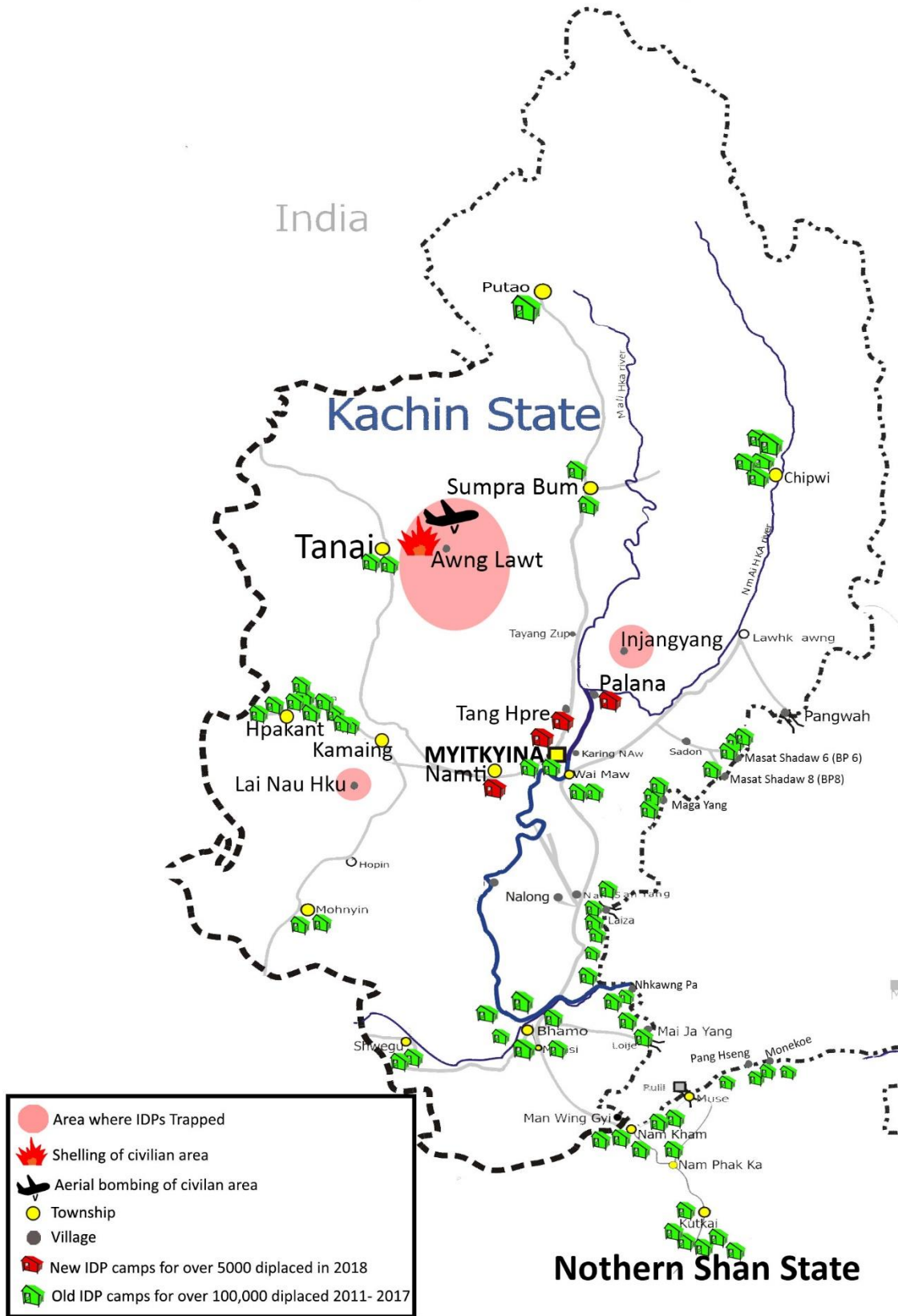
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Location of Burma Army war crimes in April 2018





AwngLawt IDPs in the jungle.



IDPs from Awng Lawt fleeing in the jungle



Awnglawt villager, Yaw Han, injured by Burma Army shelling