

# *“Voting under the barrel of a gun,”* A Country At War, Not At the Polls

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A Report by: The Human Rights Foundation of Monland



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*“Of course, we want peace, but not through deception. If peace is to come, it must be through a genuine political path — not a military-led one. An election should meet democratic standards in which people’s votes truly matter. The junta’s election will never meet that standard.”*

*— Resistance fighter, Liberated area, 6 August 2025*

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	Page 4
Situation Overview in Southeastern Burma.....	Page 7
Overview of Mon State.....	Page 9
Overview of Karen State.....	Page 13
Overview of Tanintharyi Region.....	Page 16
Fears and Concerns Surrounding the Sham Election by the Military Junta.....	Page 18
Structures and Mechanics of the Sham Election in HURFOM Target Areas.....	Page 22
Response by the International Community .....	Page 47
Conclusion.....	Page 50
Recommendations.....	Page 51

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past four and a half years, the human rights situation in Burma has rapidly deteriorated. The attempted military coup has resulted in the destruction and disruption of local livelihoods, as civilians are frequently shot at in their homes and in their villages, making it nearly impossible to find safe ways to work. Amid a faltering economy, rising costs of basic goods and commodities have added to the challenges faced by local people struggling to survive on essential supplies. Children, traumatized by the legacy of the junta's violence, have been unable to find refuge even in schools or clinics, which have offered no shield from the barrage of bullets and bombs indiscriminately dropped by the junta.

The last year has seen an intensification of war and its devastating impacts across targeted areas of the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), including Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region. Civilians remain trapped in a cycle of fear, violence, and exploitation. Patterns of forced conscription, arbitrary arrest, airstrikes, artillery shelling, and extortion continue to devastate local communities.

The conditions on the ground make it clear that no genuine democratic process is possible with the junta at the helm. Over 3.5 million people are displaced, many sheltering in forests, caves, or border zones. Schools, clinics, religious sites, and homes are daily targets of airstrikes, drone assaults, and artillery fire. Families who survive bombardments face forced conscription, with their sons and daughters abducted from checkpoints and sent to the frontlines as cannon fodder. Under these circumstances, even the most basic principles of an election—safety, freedom of movement, and the right to choose—are absent.

As the junta prepares to stage what it calls a “multi-party democratic general election” between 28 December 2025 and the first week of January 2026, fear and skepticism are spreading across Mon State, Karen State and the Tanintharyi region. People living under constant military control view the planned polls not as a return to democracy but as another political maneuver to extend the junta's power. Many communities, especially in conflict-affected and resistance-held areas, have already dismissed the process as meaningless. Their voices reflect deep distrust of the military's intentions and frustration with ASEAN and the international community's inaction.

The sham election is the junta's latest in its scheme for legitimacy in Burma. After having claimed election fraud in 2020 despite no evidence, the junta has led the country down a path of violence and destruction, with more than 7,000 people killed and nearly 30,000 arbitrarily arrested. Voter suppression and exploitation are rife. Villagers are pressured to register, threatened with fines or arrest, and told their names will be “checked” by soldiers. Armed patrols accompany election officials, turning routine registration into a moment of fear.

For displaced families in Yebyu, Launglon, and Kyaikmayaw, the idea of voting feels surreal when survival is at risk. *“They tell us to prepare to vote, but how can we when our homes are ash and our children hide from planes?”* a villager told HURFOM.

Meanwhile, the junta has intensified its air and ground offensives ahead of the vote. These actions are not random: they are part of an effort to regain control of constituencies and establish authority before the first phase of voting. In late August 2025, HURFOM documented shelling of displacement sites in Yebyu and Dawei Districts, along with increased drone surveillance over villages in Mon State.

The escalation has forced entire communities to flee. Humanitarian workers warn that the number of those internally displaced in the Tanintharyi Region could double. Observers believe the military is escalating attacks to regain lost territory and to intimidate civilians into compliance. Residents also note that the junta has deliberately targeted civilian villages, making daily life impossible. Roads remain blocked, and food and rice supplies are cut off, leaving families hungry and unprotected.

*“This is not just fighting resistance forces; it is deliberate punishment of civilians. Without urgent cross-border humanitarian assistance, people will face even more starvation and danger. International actors must not look away. Cross-border aid needs to be scaled up, and ethnic resistance organizations should be supported in preparing resettlement and response programs,”* said a humanitarian aid worker.

The sham election is more than just a domestic scheme; it carries significant regional risks. By asserting a false mandate, the junta seeks recognition, resources, and influence in international forums. If unopposed, this could prolong the conflict and hinder the development of federal democratic governance that is already taking hold in resistance-controlled regions.

*“The junta’s election is not genuine. It’s designed only to strengthen their power. People cannot trust it. The only moral response is to refuse to vote. If the people don’t accept it, the election will fail,”* explained a local security member.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HURFOM Interview Dhamma Pala area, Ye Chaung Phya region, 5 August 2025

For the people of Burma, this sham election process offers no hope. It is not a step towards democracy but an obstacle to peace. HURFOM's documentation, along with that of other civil society groups, clearly shows that the vast majority of citizens reject the junta's planned election. Their demand is not for ballots amid bombs, but for justice, accountability, and a true democratic future.

*“The [junta] wants legitimacy, not democracy. The military is desperate to hold on to power and gain international recognition. The United States government has already told Thailand that it will not recognize the junta's election, and Japan has also demanded the release of political prisoners before any election can take place. Only then might something real happen,”* said a resistance fighter from the Chaung Nihwe area, New Mon State Party-administered territory.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, this report, **“Voting Under the Barrel of a Gun,” A Country At War, Not At the Polls**, will concentrate on the junta's pre-election period, with a strong focus on the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation. It will also assess the effects of the junta's constitutional extension and the negative impact on civilians in our targeted regions. This report incorporates voices from the ground, including testimonies from IDPs, villagers, youth, activists, and experts. Additionally, we will include existing documented data on airstrikes, forced conscription, displacement, and repression.

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<sup>2</sup>HURFOM Interview, 5 August 2025

## SITUATION OVERVIEW IN SOUTHEASTERN BURMA



In HURFOM's target areas across Mon State, southern Karen State, and northern Tanintharyi region, the sham election is experienced not as politics but as violence. Despite losing control of vast territories to Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs) and resistance forces, the junta-appointed Union Election Commission announced on August 15 that all 330 townships will be constituencies—even those in active war zones.

A Mon researcher described this as pure theatre: *“This is the junta pretending to control the whole country. They are including territories they clearly do not govern, just to claim legitimacy. The upcoming election is not about democracy—it is a cover-up to secure power.”*

For civilians, this announcement is meaningless compared to their daily struggle for survival. An elder in Thaton Township put it plainly: *“They talk about elections while they are shelling our homes. Who can think about voting when our children are hiding in the forests?”*

A resistance fighter added: *“This election might lead to further chaos, possibly reaching a point where parts of the country break away. In places like Rakhine State, an election is impossible because the Arakan Army controls the area. The same goes for the Karen National Union and the Kachin Independence Army territories. Things could get much worse.”*<sup>3</sup>

Residents across Mon State and the Tanintharyi region have shown little to no interest in the voter lists posted by the junta-controlled Election Commission. The Commission announced that voter lists would be displayed at ward and village administration offices between September 30 and October 13, 2025. Local administrators have been using loudspeakers and vehicles to urge people to check the lists. However, residents report that almost no one has taken the time to review them.

A 30-year-old man from Pa-An explained: *“In September, they forced one person from every household to go to the office for a mock voting exercise. Now they’ve posted these voter lists and are shouting at people to come and check if the names match. But no one cares. People are not interested at all. Even if my name is on the list, I don’t feel any obligation to go and vote.”*

The junta's state media later reported that around 300 people attended an event organized by the Dawei Township Election Sub-Commission. Union Election Commission member U Than Htut Thein personally oversaw the demonstration, showing how to install and operate the machines, tally results, and manage polling stations.

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<sup>3</sup> HURFOM interview with a local security member, Kyun Laung Village, 6 August 2025





**Photo:** Residents of Kawkareik town in Karen State report that the junta, through its administrative offices, is pressuring displaced families who have recently returned to the town to attend mock voting demonstrations. Locals say people are being told they will be required to cast ballots when the regime’s election takes place.

*“They showed people how to press the buttons on the machines and then made them vote for made-up parties, like the Durian Party, the Eggplant Party, and the Watermelon Party,”* a Dawei resident explained, describing the farcical nature of the demonstration.

These staged events are taking place even as clashes between resistance forces and junta troops intensify in Dawei District, where checkpoints and armed confrontations have become part of daily life. Despite the worsening conflict, the junta’s election body is pressing forward step by step with preparations for a military-controlled vote.

According to announcements, Phase 1 elections in Tanintharyi Region will be held in Dawei, Myeik, Kawthoung, and Bokpyin townships. Nationwide, six political parties have registered to contest, though the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is fielding the most candidates, 1,018. The National Unity Party (NUP), also a long-time ally of military rule, follows with 694 candidates.

For communities in Dawei, these forced demonstrations underscore how the junta is attempting to manufacture legitimacy through intimidation and control, while ordinary people continue to live under fear, displacement, and violence. In Mawlamyine, the situation is the same. A resident told HURFOM that there is widespread apathy: *“Not only do people ignore the voter lists, but the whole idea of this election doesn’t matter to them. Nobody is interested in which party or candidate they should vote for. To be honest, there are no plans to cast ballots at all.”*



Reports from Tanintharyi confirm that voter lists are repeatedly announced over loudspeakers because so few people are checking them. In Kawthaung, one resident said: *“In the evenings, it is common to hear and see officials driving around town with loudspeakers saying voter lists had been posted at the ward offices. But hardly anyone went. They drive around to pressure people to go check.”*

Local monitors told HURFOM that the junta has intensified its “clearance operations” through more frequent airstrikes and artillery shelling, even in areas far from active conflict. Residents believe these increasing military offensives are part of the military’s ongoing efforts to intimidate communities and secure control ahead of its planned “sham election.”



## OVERVIEW OF MON STATE

The Mon State Federal Council (MSFC) and the Mon State Consultative Council (MSCC), two revolutionary political bodies representing Mon people, announced on the morning of 18 September that they will join forces to oppose the military junta’s planned sham election. The decision was made following an online meeting between the two groups on 16 September, during which members discussed the current political and military situation. Following their discussions, both sides agreed to coordinate efforts at every stage — before, during, and after the election — to resist the junta’s attempt to claim legitimacy through the polls.

Nai Phone Myat, head of External Relations for MSFC, explained: *“We see this election as an attempt by the junta to cover up its ongoing crimes and human rights violations. It has no political legitimacy. That is why we are standing together to oppose it.”*

The groups agreed that their joint strategy would include raising awareness among local communities, building unity among Mon revolutionary forces, and amplifying international advocacy to expose the illegitimacy of the junta’s election. U Tet Toe, a senior member of MSCC, told HURFOM: *“If people are pushed to vote under this sham system, the junta will later claim: ‘You chose this government, so you must accept what it does to you.’ That is why we will work with others who also reject this election, to prevent such manipulation.”*

The online meeting was attended by MSFC leaders, including Chairman Nai Kaung Ruak and Administrative Committee Head Nai Mon Sine, as well as Dr. Khine Soe, Chairperson of MSCC, and several senior members.

This is not the first time the Mon State Federal Council has mobilized against the junta’s electoral plans. In late 2024, MSFC established an Anti-Fake Election Committee, which

launched campaigns to educate the public, issued open letters to political parties, and organized awareness-raising activities across Mon State.

With the new joint agreement, MSFC and MSCC pledged to intensify their efforts in the months ahead to ensure communities understand the dangers of participating in the junta's election. Both groups reaffirmed that they will not recognize or legitimize any results declared by the junta-controlled commission.

The Mon Progressive Party (MPP), a Mon ethnic political party, has announced plans to contest the Karen State election during the junta-controlled period. Party spokesperson Min Tun Lwin explained that whether the party wins or not depends mainly on voters. However, he admitted that compared to past elections, public interest and enthusiasm for the upcoming polls are extremely low:

*“Winning or losing depends on the mindset of the voters — their beliefs and decisions. But this time, things are very different from 2020. The situation has changed, and competition is no longer the same as it was before. As a result, people are less interested. We will still try to reach out and organize, but it all depends on the people,”* he told HURFOM.



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**Photo:** The Mon State Federal Council (MSFC) and the Mon State Consultative Council (MSCC), two revolutionary political bodies representing Mon people, announced on the morning of 18 September that they will join forces to oppose the military junta's planned sham election.

He added that ongoing political turmoil and insecurity have created serious obstacles to candidate selection. In some constituencies, candidates are being fielded only to maintain the party's presence rather than out of genuine competition. The junta's Union Election Commission (UEC) has already dissolved four parties — the National Democratic Force (NDF), the Democratic National Party (DNP), the Mon Women's Party, and the Union Farmer and Worker Party — citing failure to meet membership and office requirements.

Despite these setbacks, the MPP has confirmed it will field candidates in at least three constituencies in Karen State: one Mon ethnic constituency, one seat in Hpa-an Township, and another in Kawkareik Township. The party may expand further depending on the political climate before the deadline. Min Tun Lwin also acknowledged growing fears over security: *"Because of the fighting, security is a big concern. We have to take responsibility for our own safety. That is the reality now,"* he said.

The Mon Progressive Party is based in Karen State and was officially registered by the UEC on April 1, 2024, under registration number 48. As a Mawlamyine resident put it: *"Officials talk about safety, but the only thing we see is more fear. People are not interested in this election. They want to survive, not to vote."*

The junta has announced that elections in Mon State will be held in five townships —Kyaikto, Thaton, Mawlamyine, Chaungzon, and Kyaikmayaw —on December 28, 2025. Eleven political parties, including the USDP and Mon Unity Party, are expected to contest. Yet, with militias empowered, freedoms crushed, and people living in daily fear, these preparations reveal only the regime's determination to cling to power, not the will of the people.

## Interview: “The Junta’s Election in Mon State Is Already Unfair by Design”

During a conversation on October 7, 2025, with a Mon State election observer and a local political analyst, they shared their views with an HURFOM field reporter about how the military has been preparing for a deeply flawed election. They criticized the manipulation of administrative boundaries and population data, as well as the confusing proportional representation (PR) system being introduced across Mon State.

*“Everyone in Mon State, in fact, across the whole country, already knows that this 2025 election is a sham. People understand they’ll be forced to ‘participate’ in an election held at gunpoint,”* said one observer.

*“At the same time, the junta is trying to make their fake results appear more realistic. You can see this clearly from the way they are redrawing district boundaries.”* He explained that, under previous governments, Mon State had only two districts — Mawlamyine and Thaton.

*“Now the military has created two more, Kyaikhto District in the north and Ye District in the south, so there are four in total,”* he said. *“Normally, a district must include at least two townships to meet the legal criteria. For example, Mawlamyine District consists of five municipalities. But the newly created Ye District has only one — Ye Township itself. It’s like giving one person a big house and a large piece of land, while another person gets just a small warehouse — and then saying, ‘See? You both inherited something.’ That’s how absurd this is.”*

He went on to question how the system could even function under such conditions:

*“How will proportional representation work when one district has five townships and another has just one? Will the MP from Ye represent only one township while Mawlamyine’s represents five? Or will each vote in Ye count five times as much as a vote in Mawlamyine? Even political parties can’t explain this distortion,”* he continued. *“How can ordinary people understand? The whole structure is confusing by design.”*

Another concern raised was about the junta’s manipulation of population data in Mon State. *“The mess isn’t only about the new districts; the population figures themselves are suspicious,”* he said.

He concluded: *“This election in Mon State rests on three pillars: unequal and arbitrary district boundaries, questionable population data, and a PR system that few people understand.”*

He added that international observers should be aware of these realities: *“The world needs to see how the junta’s so-called election is just a chaotic stage show, one that ridicules democracy instead of restoring it.”*



## OVERVIEW OF KAREN STATE

The Karen National Union (KNU) has firmly rejected the military's planned election, calling it nothing more than "a selection of people and parties that serve the interests of the junta." In a statement released on August 26, the KNU urged Karen armed groups, political parties, and the broader public to resist the sham polls through nonviolent means.

The statement outlined seven key points, emphasizing that the military's election lacks any legal legitimacy or genuine public participation. It described the process as one that can be manipulated to produce any outcome the junta desires, and therefore, it must be wholly rejected. According to the KNU, the election is designed only to prolong military rule, not to provide a political solution to Burma's crisis. Instead, it warned, the process could intensify the country's conflicts.

The junta's recently announced laws — including the "Law on Protecting Elections from Obstruction" and the "Law on Protecting Citizens' Personal Freedoms and Security" — were also condemned as tools of fear and coercion that compel civilians to participate against their will. The KNU further highlighted that the junta's election ploy undermines ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and represents an attempt to disguise continued repression. It warned that political parties choosing to participate in the sham polls would obstruct the development of a genuine federal democracy.



**Photo:** The Karen National Union (KNU) has strongly rejected the military's planned election, calling it nothing more than "a selection of people and parties that serve the interests of the junta." In a statement released on 26 August, the KNU urged Karen armed groups, political parties, and the broader public to resist the sham polls through non-violent means.



Instead, the KNU reaffirmed that only elections held under a new, federal democratic constitution — one drafted and adopted through an inclusive political dialogue process — can resolve Burma's deep-rooted political crises. The group stressed that participation in the junta's election would grant false legitimacy to military rule, revive the discredited 2008 Constitution, and trap the country in a cycle of dictatorship. The KNU called on the public and political parties alike to refuse involvement, warning that those who collaborate risk becoming *“historical accomplices to the crimes of dictatorship.”*

*“Some may see joining the election as an advantage, but the resistance will never accept it. We will not take part in something that serves as a slave's work for the junta,”* explained a resistance fighter.<sup>4</sup>

The junta's election commission has held meetings with its allied armed groups, including the Border Guard Force (BGF/KNA), to discuss how to ensure the election proceeds smoothly in Myawaddy. According to a source close to the BGF, the discussions focused on preventing interference by resistance forces, including the Karen National Union (KNU), and securing polling stations, administrators, party members, and volunteers.

*“They've been in talks since before Thay Baw Boe fell. Now it's clear they are working out security arrangements for the election,”* the source said. Discussions also included deploying jamming devices to prevent drone attacks near polling areas.

On 6 September, the junta, with BGF support, retook control of the Myawaddy–Kawkareik–Asia Highway corridor. Joint Karen resistance forces had held this area for over a year. Just days before, on 3 September, the BGF had announced that it would assist the junta in organizing the election. Similarly, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), a signatory of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, publicly declared support for the junta's planned polls on 6 September.

A Karen political analyst commented: *“They once stood close to the resistance, but when their interests were threatened, they quickly switched sides. They have no shame and no legitimacy left in the eyes of the people.”*

The KNU has already made its position clear, rejecting the junta's election as illegitimate and warning that it will not recognize the process or those who assist in organizing it.

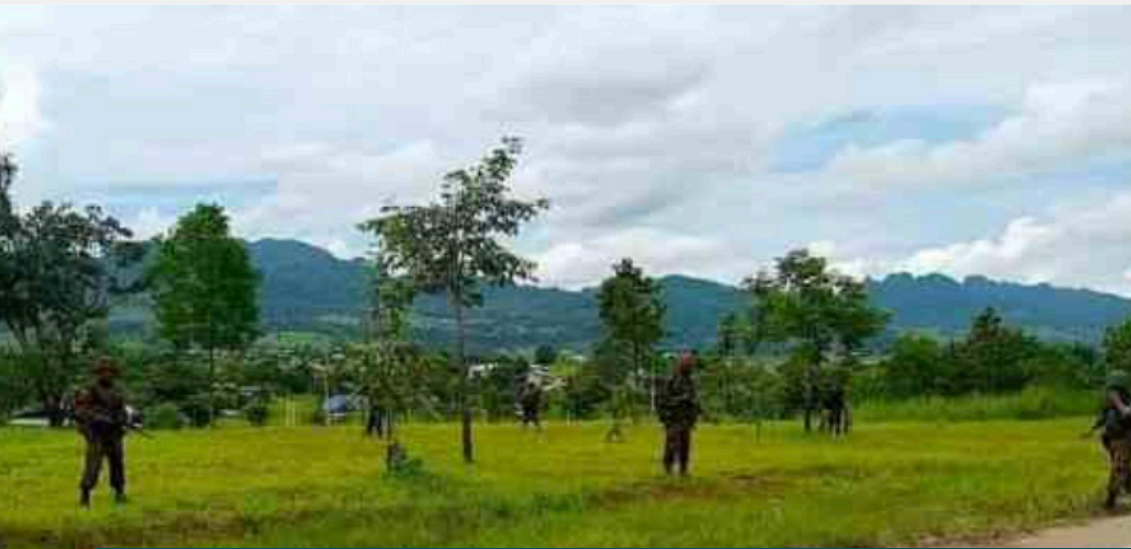
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<sup>4</sup> HURFOM interview with a Resistance fighter, Chaung Nihwhe, Liberated area, 6 August 2025

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*“Some may see joining the election as an advantage, but the resistance will never accept it. We will not take part in something that serves as a slave's work for the junta.”*

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*“As someone from Myawaddy, I cannot accept this at all. Even the 2020 election results were not respected. This one is nothing but a show. I won’t be voting.”*

Despite this, preparations in Myawaddy continue. Locals report heavy security checks by junta soldiers and BGF troops at town entrances and exits. Residents also said they are being forced to attend election-awareness activities organized by the junta’s election commission.

A 32-year-old resident told HURFOM: *“As someone from Myawaddy, I cannot accept this at all. Even the 2020 election results were not respected. This one is nothing but a show. I won’t be voting.”*

The junta has announced that the first phase of its election will take place on 28 December in Myawaddy, Hpa-An, and Hpa-Pun Townships of Karen State. Many fear that with BGF and DKBA backing, the junta may attempt to stage the vote in Myawaddy — but without the trust or participation of the local population.

However, many believe the election will only take place in tightly controlled areas, serving as a political maneuver rather than a genuine democratic process.

*“The election won’t take place in peaceful or urban areas as they claim. It will mostly happen in towns or zones where the military has strong control — maybe around 80 percent of those areas. In less secure places, perhaps only 20 percent of the election could realistically be held,”* said a member of the People’s Defence Force.<sup>5</sup>

The election is in direct violation of the 2008 military-drafted Constitution, ironically going against the very terms determined by the junta.

*“Any election held under the 2008 Constitution is just a political lifeline for the dictatorship. It brings no benefit to the people, so I urge everyone not to take part. This system offers no hope, no real opportunity for change.*

*That’s why we must continue resisting with determination and vigilance,”* said a civil society representative.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> HURFOM Interview with a PDF soldier, Liberated area

<sup>6</sup> HURFOM Interview — Civil society representative, Sangkhla Buri, Thailand, 9 September 2025



Analysts note that the junta's militarization of daily life is tied to its electoral strategy. By expanding constituencies and asserting control in contested Mon and Karen areas, the regime hopes to stage elections in places where resistance forces and federal units already have legitimacy. A local researcher from Kyaikmayaw commented, *"It is not about democracy. The election is just a tool to consolidate power. Giving weapons and privileges to militias increases repression while silencing civilians."*

These preparations mirror wider patterns across HURFOM's target areas. Security has been ramped up at administrative offices and checkpoints, with harsher restrictions on movement. Residents describe extortion at roadblocks and raids that result in looting and confiscation of property. For many, the so-called "election security" feels like another form of occupation.

The human toll continues to rise. Families who have already been displaced once are now uprooted again. Children cannot attend school, monasteries once seen as safe havens are under attack, and hundreds are seeking refuge along the Thai-Burma border. These tactics are part of the junta's ongoing strategy to terrorize civilians, weaken community structures, and prevent the return of normal life in areas losing control.



## OVERVIEW OF THE TANINTHARYI REGION

In Tanintharyi Region, HURFOM field teams documented a sharp rise in violence, with airstrikes tripling in July 2025 compared to June, and over 82,800 civilians displaced by late August. This combination of armed militias on the ground and relentless aerial bombardment from above has left people living in constant fear.

Intense fighting broke out near Launglon Town, Dawei District, on the morning of October 10, forcing residents to flee as junta troops clashed with resistance forces. The battle reportedly lasted for more than two hours, with gunfire still echoing through nearby villages the following morning. Junta forces had entered Nyin Maw Village, located close to Launglon, early on October 9 and arrested five migrant workers before moving further toward the outskirts of the town. The arrests created panic among residents already living under constant fear of military operations.

The confrontation is part of a broader escalation in Tanintharyi Region, where the junta has intensified both air and ground attacks as it pushes to regain control ahead of its planned sham election. Local humanitarian networks warn that renewed clashes are driving more families into displacement, worsening an already fragile situation for civilians in conflict-affected areas.

Local humanitarian workers reported that civilians are now facing severe shortages of food, medicine, and shelter materials as the military continues to target populated areas under the pretext of "security clearance."



**Photo:** Residents across Mon and Tanintharyi regions are showing little to no interest in the voter lists posted by the junta-controlled Election Commission ahead of its planned general election on December 28.

These repeated attacks on civilian homes and communities once again demonstrate the junta's systematic pattern of collective punishment, destroying lives and livelihoods to instill fear and regain control over resistance-held areas.

Fierce fighting between junta troops and resistance forces broke out near Launglon Town, Dawei District, on the morning of October 10, forcing hundreds of residents to flee their homes. Local sources told HURFOM that the clashes lasted for more than two hours, with gunfire continuing intermittently until the next day.

Before the fighting, troops from Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) 406 and 408 entered Nyin Maw Village on October 9, where they arrested five migrant workers who had been living there for farm work. As of October 13, the men, identified by family members as Ko Thet Oo (44) and U Toe (50), among others, remain missing. Their relatives have received no information about their whereabouts or condition since they were taken away.

A 35-year-old man close to the victims' families said, *"The military entered early in the morning and took away five migrant workers who were not from our village. They came here more than two years ago to work in the fields. Since they were arrested, we haven't heard anything. We're very worried because in past clashes, the junta used villagers as human shields or forced them to walk in front of their troops."*

Fighting continued until the afternoon of October 13 as the junta pushed deeper into the area. More than 200 villagers have since fled their homes to seek safety. A former village committee member told HURFOM that arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances have become common.

*“The military deliberately positions itself among civilians, using them as cover during battles. It’s a clear pattern of crimes against humanity. Over the past two years, at least ten people from our area have been taken and never returned.”*

As the junta’s election commission prepares for its planned polls, military operations and airstrikes have intensified across Tanintharyi Region. Local monitors report that the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has exceeded 20,000, with entire communities uprooted amid the military’s escalating attacks.

## FEARS AND CONCERNS SURROUNDING THE SHAM ELECTION BY THE MILITARY JUNTA

The junta’s plans to have an election are being portrayed as a move towards stability. In reality, this so-called election is merely a sham, intended to create a false appearance of legitimacy. Meanwhile, the country remains mired in civil war, repression, and humanitarian disaster. Independent analysts, human rights organizations, and communities across the country widely reject this election as a hollow performance.

*“The people see it as performance, not a vote,”* a Burmese-Australian lawyer told ABC News—capturing a sentiment shared by many within the diaspora and on the ground. *“There are millions of people who are displaced. The main democratic party is locked away. This is just theatre for the generals.”*<sup>7</sup>

Wai Wai Nu, Executive Director of the Women’s Peace Network, underscores the junta’s intent: *“This sham election is only to maintain their power or control... Regardless of who wins, it’s just the military changing their uniform.”*<sup>8</sup>

Nearby observers, including neighbouring countries, risk lending legitimacy to this façade if they fail to denounce the process. *“An unfair and restricted election would only bring more chaos and breed further resentment among the people [of Burma],”* one South Asian Voices contributor warned.<sup>9</sup>

Resistance forces constrain the junta’s capacity to hold an election much further than towns under strict military control. Regions like Sagaing report that the junta can compile voter lists in only a few areas: most villages are outside their reach.<sup>10</sup> Analysts estimate voting may be confined to fewer than half of the country’s 330 townships, with large swaths under resistance control.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Are Myanmar’s upcoming elections a ‘peace-building process’ or a ‘trap’?, ABC, 5 September 2025

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Myanmar’s Planned Elections Risk Breeding More Resentment, South Asian Voices, 11 May 2025

<sup>10</sup> “Personally, I think they can have the votes of the residents. But our forces have plans to prevent this unfair election in every possible way.” – An official of Banmauk Revolution-BR, Myanmar Peace Monitor, 26 January 2023

<sup>11</sup> Myanmar to organize election in fewer than half of townships, parties say, Radio Free Asia, 10 December 2024



*“The junta is pretending things are normal, but in reality, people are being given death sentences or long prison terms just for helping the resistance.”*

**Photo:** The Mon Progressive Party (MPP), a Mon ethnic political party, has announced plans to contest in Karen State under the junta-controlled election scheduled for December 28, 2025.

This inherently partisan process is opposed by major armed groups, including KNU Brigade 6, who have warned communities against participation and imposed sanctions on collaborators:

*“KNU Brigade 6 marks anyone who supports the junta’s election as a historical traitor.”<sup>12</sup>*

Military strategists understand that momentum matters more than territorial control in this election. They aim to reclaim enough towns—not necessarily to hold them for long—but to assemble the appearance of nationwide authority. *“These military offensives are directly linked to their election plans. If they can show the world they hold territory, they gain legitimacy,”* noted a resistance fighter when speaking to local media outlet, the Irrawaddy.<sup>13</sup>

Financial and legal barriers worsen the problem. Political party registration laws now require large sums of funding and unrealistic membership thresholds, which are designed to block opposition, resulting in many ethnic parties being disqualified: *“They’re changing the words, not the reality. It’s all wordplay. The junta is pretending things are normal, but in reality, people are being given death sentences or long prison terms just for helping the resistance. Blocking or rejecting this election isn’t a crime — yet they punish people to make it look like one,”* said a resistance fighter.<sup>14</sup>

While international actors remain hesitant, local resistance movements are making their positions clear. In Mon State and central Burma, armed and political alliances are rejecting the junta’s staged election and committing to strengthening cooperation on both political and military fronts. Their declarations highlight a reality too often overlooked by outside observers: while the international community debates, communities and resistance groups are paying the highest price and are united in their refusal to legitimize the generals’ sham process.

*“It’s not a democratic election — it’s a political escape route. It won’t solve the country’s problems. It’s just another way for the junta to trap itself in its own false promises and keep its power alive,”* said a local security member.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Myanmar Domestic News Updates – Aug 31, 2025 Evening

<sup>13</sup> Myanmar Junta’s Pre-Poll Military Push Projects Strength at Heavy Civilian Cost, 1 September 2025, the Irrawaddy

<sup>14</sup> HURFOM Interview: — Resistance fighter, Chaung Nihwe, Liberated area, 6 August 2025

<sup>15</sup> HURFOM Interview with a local security member, Dhamma Pala Village, Ye Township, 5 August 2025



On 3 September, the Mon State Federal Council (MSFC) and the People's Revolutionary Alliance (PRA – Magway) publicly announced a joint agreement to resist the military junta's planned sham election, set to begin on 28 December 2025. According to sources close to the discussions, MSFC Defence Department leaders and representatives met with members of PRA-Magway's Central Committee on 30 August. Their talks produced three key agreements: **rejecting the junta's fraudulent election, strengthening political cooperation, and supporting each other militarily and politically in the struggle against dictatorship.**

Both groups pledged to work together until the military system is uprooted and a genuine federal union is established. Their statement reflects the widespread determination among resistance actors that legitimacy rests with the people, not with the junta's staged ballot box. For civilians in Mon and Karen States and the Tanintharyi Region, this pledge is more than symbolic—it mirrors their daily realities. In August, HURFOM documented how forced conscription, indiscriminate shelling, and targeted raids forced nearly 4,000 people from ten villages in Yebyu Township to flee in just two weeks. Many told our field reporters that they believe the junta's recent offensives are tied directly to preparing constituencies for its sham election.

*“They are bombing us to empty our villages, so they can say the people are under their control,”* explained a displaced villager from Mayan Chaung, Yebyu Township.

Another young man from Ye Township shared his fear: *“They came to our ward, asking for names and families to prepare for the election. But people here don't want it. We only want to survive the next airstrike. How can we talk about voting when we are running for our lives?”*

The junta has also intensified surveillance and repression in Mon State. Civilians caught with VPNs on their phones face fines and arrests, while community leaders are threatened for refusing to cooperate with election preparations. One woman from Thanbyuzayat Township described the impact bluntly: *“They want to silence us completely before December, so that the only voice heard will be theirs.”*

By linking arms, groups like the MSFC and PRA-Magway are voicing the position that many communities have already taken in practice: rejecting the junta's election and refusing to lend legitimacy to its rule. While the costs of resistance remain unbearably high—families displaced, children killed by landmines, villages burned—the shared conviction is that accepting the junta's ballot box is far worse. As one community elder told HURFOM after fleeing artillery fire in Dawei District: *“Even if they force us, we cannot recognize this election. It is not for the people, it is only for the generals. Our suffering shows the truth.”*

The decision by the Mon State Federal Council (MSFC) and the People's Revolutionary Alliance in Magway to formally oppose the junta's sham election is both a declaration of unity and a warning. Communities across Burma have long understood that the so-called election is nothing more than an attempt to prolong military rule through false legitimacy. Their rejection echoes a broader call for federal democracy and the dismantling of dictatorship at its roots. Yet as these alliances grow stronger, the international community's silence and hesitation remain striking.

In Mon State, the current Chief Minister is using his official power, budgetary resources and state-sponsored projects for election campaign purposes. Observers say public funds earmarked for education, social welfare, and religious festivals are being deployed as tools to win votes, leveraging service delivery as a form of campaigning under the guise of governance.

On 5 November, an event was held at the Rama Nyein Hall to distribute support items to 30 primary schools filing for the 2025-26 academic year's Schools Budget and award. State budget allocations funded these handouts and were initially intended for the school year ahead. Still, the timing, just before the campaign season, suggests a calculated attempt to earn public favour. Some education officials, speaking anonymously, say the Chief Minister, U Aung Kyi Thein, should be ashamed of this obvious vote-seeking tactic.

While Mon State and other Southern part regions, including Bago, Mon, Karen and Tanintharyi Region, are still enmeshed in armed conflict, the administration has carried on as though everything is peaceful, holding large religious or cultural festivals and showcasing “normality” in front of voters. Locals say these are not innocent community events, but part of a USDP-organized drive to ensure electoral victory:

*“They’re using national budget funds and campaign rhetoric like ‘if USDP wins next time we will bring prosperity’, yet we all know the opposite is more likely,”* said one 40-year-old resident of Kyaikmayaw Township.

In early November, a 37th-anniversary Golf tournament was held at Mawlamyine’s Ngan Tae golf course, organized by the General Administration Department of Mon State’s Junta. The event featured state funding, religious ceremonies, and public pledges. Again, observers say the aim is to blur the lines between governance and campaigning. In villages around Kyaikmayaw, the USDP has also started vocational training programmes under the banner of “indigenous and minority rights protection,” even where minor ethnic communities say they had never been offered such support before. These sessions are anchored by the ethnic affairs minister and local party functionaries, pointing to direct party campaign methods disguised as development.

A young villager in Kyaikmayaw told our field team: *“They’ve done things in our township they never did before, just to show how much the USDP cares. It’s all happening now, so people will vote for them. Even worse, they’re using state funds for it. By turning government activities into campaign events, the Junta is treating people like they are receiving gifts from the state instead of allowing them to make their own choices. This kind of behaviour damages the fairness of the election, gives an unfair advantage to the junta-backed party, and makes it harder for other parties to compete, especially in Mon State, where people are already suffering from conflict.”*

A 50-year-old community leader in Mudon township criticized: *“For communities that are still facing violence and displacement, these campaign tactics are harmful. They make people dependent on the junta’s handouts and strengthen its control instead of providing real, rights-based support.”*

Furthermore, for communities in Mon and Karen States and the Tanintharyi Region, the election is an additional burden on already ongoing violence. Armed recruitment sweeps are targeting youth, while women and elders face arbitrary arrests and extortion. Homes, schools, and places of worship are being bombed, destroying fragile civic spaces. Community leaders and displaced populations widely reject the vote, instead focusing on survival, protection, and local self-governance.

## STRUCTURES AND MECHANICS OF THE SHAM ELECTION IN HURFOM TARGET AREAS

The junta's planned election is not an act of democracy but a desperate attempt to create legitimacy. In the areas where HURFOM operates—covering ten townships in Mon State, six in Karen State, and five in Tanintharyi Region—the preparations for this sham vote have taken place under coercion, fear, and manipulation.

What is being called an “election” lacks the characteristics of free choice; instead, it is a highly controlled military operation designed to project authority both domestically and abroad.

As the junta advances its plan to hold a so-called “multi-party democratic election”, people across the southeastern region continue to express strong rejection and fear. Those interviewed believe the upcoming polls will not bring justice, peace, or stability — only further conflict and manipulation. It is primarily viewed as a tool for prolonging military rule rather than restoring democracy.

Many have expressed deep mistrust toward political parties planning to participate, warning of greater division and violence if the junta proceeds.

*“Any political party that cooperates with the junta is not a real political party. There are only two kinds of people — those who serve the public good and those who serve themselves. These groups are not working for the country; they’re pursuing personal gain,”* said a resistance fighter.<sup>16</sup>

According to announcements by the junta-controlled Union Election Commission (UEC), eleven political parties are set to contest the regime's planned general election in Mon State. Among them, eight are parties seeking to organize nationwide, while two are based in Mon State.

The nationwide parties include the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the National Unity Party, the People's Pioneer Party, the People's Party, the National Democratic Party, the Shan and Ethnic Democratic Party (Tiger Head), the Myanmar Farmers Development Party, and the National Democratic Force.

At the state level, the Mon Unity Party (MUP) and the Pa-O National Development Party have also confirmed participation. The move has sparked criticism. U Aung Kyaw Htoo, a former parliamentarian, condemned the decision of these parties to join the junta's election:

<sup>16</sup> HURFOM interview — Resistance fighter, Liberated area, 6 August, 2025





**Photo:** In Mon State, the Chief Minister is using official powers, budget, and state projects for campaigning. Observers say funds for education, social welfare, and festivals are exploited for votes, with service delivery used as campaigning under the guise of governance.

*“These parties are staining their own political history. Their leaders may be driven by self-interest or pressure, but by entering this sham process, they are showing their loyalty to the junta. In the end, history will judge them as complicit,”* he said. He added that any government formed through the junta’s election will remain under military control, and nothing will truly change: *“The parties that take part will be remembered not as legitimate actors, but as collaborators who sided with repression,”* he said.

Meanwhile, U Aung Ko Win Than, a representative of the People’s Party in Mon State, defended participation: *“We want to pursue politics through political means. Whatever the challenges, whether secure or insecure, we have decided to engage through political channels,”* he said.

The junta has declared that the first phase of its election will be held on December 28, 2025, covering 102 townships nationwide, including five in Mon State: Kyaikto, Thaton, Mawlamyine, Chaungzon, and Kyaikmayaw Townships. However, resistance forces have strongly warned the public and political parties not to collaborate with what they call a fraudulent process. They emphasize that participation would only legitimize military rule. Instead, they are urging people to resist in every way possible.

A local security member told HURFOM that the resistance movement is trying to keep up the pressure on the junta to prevent the election from taking place” *“In rural areas, [the military junta] can’t go door to door to collect votes. Our target is clear —the resistance will continue to pressure the junta and try to prevent the election from taking place. Clashes could break out at any time.”*<sup>17</sup>

The junta’s election body has insisted that at least one person per household must verify the list to ensure its “accuracy.” They have also stated that missing names can be added with Form 3, unqualified names can be challenged with Form 4, and errors can be corrected with Form 4(g). A final version of the lists is expected to be posted in November. Yet across HURFOM’s target areas, the reality is apparent: people remain indifferent to the junta’s sham election preparations. Years of repression, displacement, and violence have left communities with no faith in the process or belief that their participation will bring genuine change.

### *Voter lists and local administrations under threat*

Since July 2025, ward and village administrators in Mon State and the Tanintharyi region have been forced to compile voter lists. In many cases, they are required to submit names even from villages that have been displaced for a long time or are now under the control of resistance groups. Local administrators describe being threatened with arrest or removal if they fail to comply with the requirements. In Kyaikmayaw and Ye Townships, administrators were pressured to include the names of villagers who had been absent for months due to displacement.

A community leader in Yebyu Township told HURFOM fieldworkers: *“They demanded lists of households, even though half the people have fled. If we do not submit, they accuse us of supporting the armed resistance movement. It is impossible—we are asked to count people who no longer live here.”*

In some areas, junta-backed militias accompany administrators to villages to collect household data. The process creates fear, as residents understand their names on such lists may later be used for forced conscription or monitoring. Junta-appointed Chief Minister of Mon State, U Aung Kyi Thein, has been tasked with overseeing preparations to ensure the regime’s planned election is carried out in the state. According to a senior civil servant who spoke to HURFOM on July 29, 2025, heavy pressure is being placed on government departments, district and township officials, and even village-level administrators to cooperate.

The official, who requested anonymity, described how civil servants were threatened with severe punishment if the election in Mon State did not proceed “successfully.” He noted that meetings have been dominated by orders to prepare training sessions on the Myanmar Electronic Voting Machines (MEVMs). These trainings are expected to be rolled out across townships included in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the junta’s election plan within two months.

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<sup>17</sup> HURFOM Interview with a local security member, Kyun Laung Village, 6 August 2025



By late July 2025, the first training was held at the Mon State Hall in Mawlamyine, attended by U Aung Kyi Thein, regime ministers, local election commission officials, and dozens of government staff. Participants were instructed on how to handle the electronic voting machines, including installation, mock polling, data entry, vote counting, and packing and storage.

While the Chief Minister claimed the use of MEVMs would prevent spoiled ballots and speed up accurate counting, many attendees were deeply skeptical. As one civil servant explained: “Everyone knows these so-called ‘control units’ are entirely in the hands of the junta’s technical teams. That means the results—the numbers—can be changed at will. No one believes this will be a free or fair election. The outcome is already in their hands.”

Despite the regime’s propaganda, the training has been marked by low enthusiasm. Many officials and students forced to attend said the sessions were dull and uninspiring, with no genuine interest shown by the participants. The training program has already included 376 people, drawn chiefly from basic education schools, between July 23 and 26. More sessions are planned throughout August and September. On the ground, however, the perception among both civil servants and local people is clear: the junta’s “election” is little more than a staged exercise designed to extend military control, not a genuine expression of public will.

During the ceremony, Mon State Chief Minister U Aung Kyi Thein declared that the upcoming election would be “historic” as it would be the first in Burma to use electronic voting machines (MEVMs). He insisted that the machines would make it easier for citizens to cast their votes and emphasized that training officials to handle the devices properly was critical.

According to the Chief of State’s remarks, the training included instructions on setting up and installing the machines, conducting mock polling, distributing ballots,



**Photo:** In Hpa-An Township, Karen State, the junta is organizing forced demonstrations and trainings on the use of its electronic voting machines (EVMs) in preparation for its planned sham election. According to state-controlled notices, the activities are being carried out across nine wards and eighty-eight village tracts by eight separate teams between 22 and 31 August.

managing the machines on election day, counting results, preparing tallies in accordance with regulations, and finally repacking and storing the equipment. He claimed that the use of MEVMs would prevent spoiled ballots, reduce counting errors, and ensure that results could be announced quickly and accurately.

However, a senior civil servant from Mon State, who attended the session, strongly rejected these claims: *“No matter what U Aung Kyi Thein said, everyone knows the so-called ‘control units’ are entirely in the junta’s hands. Their technical teams can manipulate the numbers and results as they see fit. Many of us were already sitting there and knew this. I am one of them. That is why I can say with certainty that the upcoming election will never be free, fair, or accurate. The results are already in the junta’s hands.”*

In Hpa-An Township, Karen State, the junta organized forced demonstrations and training on the use of its electronic voting machines. According to state-controlled notices, the activities are being carried out across nine wards and eighty-eight village tracts by eight separate teams between August 22 and 31, 2025.

Residents in Hpa-An town reported that local administrators, acting under junta orders, distributed invitations to households, calling them to attend “awareness sessions” on the EVM machines. These gatherings were presented as educational talks, but attendees were informed that attendance was mandatory. Currently, households in Wards No. 1 and No. 4, under the control of junta-appointed administrators and soldiers, were each instructed to send at least two people per family, including anyone over 18. One resident said the events were staged in crowded halls, including the compound of Hpa-An No. 2 High School:

*“They recently held demonstrations on how to use the machines. They divided people into morning, afternoon, and evening groups. The hall was full,”* explained a local woman. Villagers from surrounding areas also received letters demanding attendance. According to one man from a nearby village, people were warned they would face punishment if they refused: *“Some villages were told they would be beaten if they didn’t attend. The message was clear: come, or face consequences,”* he said.



*Hpa-An is among the 102 townships where the junta has announced the first phase of its staged election will be held on 28 December 2025. Locals view the mock trainings as another form of intimidation aimed at forcing them to participate in an illegitimate process.*

Hpa-An is among the 102 townships where the junta has announced the first phase of its staged election will be held on 28 December 2025. Locals view the mock trainings as another form of intimidation aimed at forcing them to participate in an illegitimate process.

*“We won’t pressure civilians living in areas we can’t reach. They’re already surviving under constant fear. Forcing them would only cause more harm. All we want is for people to have genuine freedom again,”* said a resistance fighter.<sup>18</sup>

Election watch individuals and political observers who spoke with HURFOM field reporters said that the junta-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has already secured automatic victories in 28 constituencies across the country, without any actual voting or competition. In these constituencies, no candidates from other political parties were permitted or able to register, resulting in USDP representatives being declared winners by default. These areas include Yebyu, Thayetchaung, and Launglon Townships, three key HURFOM documentation targeted areas in Tanintharyi Region, where residents have been living under aerial and ground attacks, tight military surveillance, and repeated intimidation.

Under the junta-controlled Election Commission, the USDP submitted 1,018 candidates for the upcoming polls—the most of any political party. These include 265 candidates for the House of Representatives, 156 for the House of Nationalities, 569 for State and Regional Parliaments, and 28 for posts as ethnic affairs ministers.

According to the junta’s Election Law (Chapter 9, Section 41(a)), if only one candidate is registered in a constituency, the Election Commission can declare that person the winner without holding a vote. Using this provision, the regime has announced that in 28 constituencies, where no rival candidates were permitted to compete, USDP representatives automatically “won.” This includes 13 seats in the House of Representatives, 13 in regional parliaments, and 2 in ministerial positions for ethnic affairs. A USDP source revealed that the candidates who won by default have been warned to take extra security precautions and, if they feel ‘unsafe’, to relocate to Nay Pyi Taw.

The Union Election Commission (UEC), operating under direct junta control, has officially confirmed the delineation of 102 constituencies for the first phase of the election, including in Mon and Tanintharyi Regions. These areas include Yebyu, Thayetchaung, and Launglon Townships. In these townships, USDP candidates were automatically declared winners, even though no credible political campaigning or competition took place.

The list of constituencies where the USDP has been declared the uncontested winner includes Shwegu, Mansi, Naungmoon, Minkyin, Kawlin, Tamu, Butalin, Mawlaik, Kani, Wuntho, Salin Gyi, Ye-U, Ye Phyu, Launglon, Thayetchaung, Pha Khon, Matman, Mohnyin, and Kyaukme Townships. HURFOM field sources noted that since September, junta-backed authorities have tightened security across Mon State and Tanintharyi Region under the pretext of “election preparation.”

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<sup>18</sup> HURFOM Interview — Resistance fighter, Chaung Nikhwe, Liberated area, 6 August 2025

Advanced surveillance technologies such as the Person Scrutinization and Monitoring System (PSMS) and widespread checkpoints have been deployed, further restricting the movement of civilians and political observers.

Despite the Election Commission's claim that over 50 political parties and 5,000 candidates are competing, the election process is dominated by the USDP and other military-backed parties. Most independent and ethnic political parties have been banned, intimidated, or severely restricted, leaving no space for genuine democratic participation.

*"They don't care whether people vote or not — the results are already set. Even if no one votes, Min Aung Hlaing will declare himself president. He's already arranged it. They didn't seize power for the people's benefit, but for themselves. This election isn't for citizens — it's only to protect their positions. They've already ignored people's suffering. International attention is rising, but not enough. The junta will keep bombing villages while pretending to prepare for elections. Even when resistance groups tried to stop the registration process in some areas, the junta found ways to collect names,"* said a local security member.<sup>19</sup>

The public and civil society organizations widely view the junta's so-called election as a sham process aimed at legitimizing military control, not an exercise in democracy. The absence of political opposition, the denial of free expression, and the climate of fear make this upcoming vote meaningless for the people of Burma. As one HURFOM researcher stated: *"Without opposition parties, free campaigning, or the people's participation, this election is nothing but a show. The junta is voting for itself."*

### Coercion and forced participation

The mechanics of the junta's sham election depend heavily on fear. In Mawlamyine, HURFOM received reports that civil servants and teachers were warned that refusal to participate would result in dismissal or legal consequences under the Counter-Terrorism Law. In Yebyu Township, villagers told monitors they were ordered to attend "voter education sessions" hosted by junta officials and militias. One villager from Thar Yar Mon explained: *"They call it voter education, but it is more like intimidation. We are told that if we do not show up on Election Day, we will be fined or face worse consequences. Nobody dares to refuse."*

These tactics reveal the junta's reliance on coercion rather than consent. Participation is driven by fear of reprisal, not political choice.

### Exclusion of Opposition and Ethnic Parties

The structures of this election were designed to eliminate credible opponents. Following the 2021 coup, the National League for Democracy (NLD), the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), and numerous Mon and Karen political parties were deregistered under new election laws that required enormous membership and funding thresholds. This means that in HURFOM's

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<sup>19</sup> HURFOM interview with a local security member, Dhamma Pala area, Ye Chaung Phya region, 5 August 2025





**Photo:** On 5 November, an event was held at Rama Nyein Hall to distribute support items to 30 primary schools applying for the Schools Budget and award for the 2025-26 academic year.

project areas, the ballot will primarily feature junta-aligned parties or newly formed groups loyal to the military. As one activist from Mawlamyine told HURFOM: *“They have erased all real political voices. What remains are only their puppets. How can this be called an election when the people’s parties are gone?”*

### ***Militarization of Election Preparations***

The junta’s reliance on violence is deeply ingrained in its preparations for the election. In Kawkaik and Kyainnseiky, residents described military checkpoints being established near potential polling sites, while artillery shelling continued in nearby villages. In Mon State’s Kyaikhto Township, airstrikes in late August killed and injured civilians even as local administrators were being forced to prepare lists for the vote.

Resistance groups have warned villagers not to participate. KNU Brigade 6 stated that anyone supporting the junta’s election would be marked as traitors to the people. This leaves communities caught in the middle, fearing retaliation from both the junta and resistance actors if they engage. A displaced woman in Kywe Talin shared: *“The military says we must vote. The resistance says we must not. But we only want to survive. For us, there is no election—only fear.*

*“The conflict will only grow worse. The military will keep doing what it does — bombing and shooting will not stop, and the country will not be stable. This election will take place only in the areas they control, but even there, it won’t succeed. Whether people vote or not doesn’t matter to them — they already have the ballots and the results in their hands,”* added a civilian.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “Voting under the barrel of a gun,” A Country At War, Not At the Polls

<sup>20</sup> Online interview via Zoom, 9 September 2025



A member of the People's Defence Force shared with HURFOM: *"The junta will certainly push ahead with the election to appear legitimate and to create a political exit for themselves. But from a democratic perspective, it means nothing. Since the coup, they have shown no compassion toward the people. Even during the last 90-day emergency period, they continued to launch military offensives across every area under martial law. So, whatever happens, they will proceed — even if it deepens the suffering of civilians."*<sup>21</sup>

In Mon State, the junta has tightened its grip on civilian life by embedding military officers into township administration and management committees as part of its preparations for a sham election. Officers at the rank of Major are no longer merely serving as representatives; they are also taking leadership positions across key departments.

This militarization has translated into daily hardships for ordinary people: travel is restricted, trade routes are blocked, access to information is censored, and fundamental freedoms are stripped away. Residents told HURFOM that their right to move, work, and live with dignity is being violated at every turn. These repressive measures are fueling fear and mistrust, forcing families to flee and deepening the cycle of displacement that communities have endured for decades.

On July 31, 2025, the junta issued instructions mandating that all township administration and management committees be composed of 7 members, including a mandatory military representative. Following this directive, new committees were formed in early August in townships including Mawlamyine, Kyaikhto, Paung, Bilin, Mudon, and Thanbyuzayat. Residents in Mudon reported that decision-making has already become more rigid with military representatives at the table.

A former civil servant who requested to remain anonymous, and who is also close to the Mudon township administrative office, explained: *"Military officers have long interfered in civilian administration and management, but what we see now is different. Almost every level of the committees has been systematically filled with junta representatives, particularly officers at the rank of Major who were appointed just last month. This is clearly part of a broader strategy."*

*For the junta, securing Mon State is critical to ensure their planned election can be staged smoothly and the outcome declared in their favour. For ordinary people, however, it only means more restrictions on their daily lives—less freedom to move, more surveillance, and tighter control at every layer of administration."*

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with a member of a People's Defence Force, Liberated area under the New Mon State Party, 6 August 2025

Local sources confirmed that township meetings are now being held more frequently, with election security a constant topic of discussion. In Paung, for example, not only does the committee include a military junta representative, but the head of planning, the township legal officer, and even the township administrator are military appointees. *“Here in Paung, the planning department chief, the township law officer, and the administrator are all military officers. This means every decision will be closely controlled,”* a local contact explained.

Meanwhile, residents are facing intensified surveillance and restrictions on social media use, cross-border trade, and freedom of movement. Similar appointments have been reported in other states and regions, not just Mon State. The junta’s attempt to embed military personnel into administrative structures follows its long-standing pattern of reshuffling leaders at both civilian and military levels. Now, it is reaching further down into township and village administration in an effort to consolidate control.

At the same time, the pressure is creating profound dilemmas for village administrators. Faced with threats from the military on one side and warnings from resistance forces on the other, several local administrators have resigned from their posts this year rather than continue working under the control of the regime.

*“This shows just how determined the junta is to turn what should be civilian administration into another extension of its military machine — all just to stage an election that no one believes will be free or fair,”* said a 65-year-old former Mon politician.

*“Rather than earning trust, their control over township administration has only deepened fear and suffering for ordinary people, while taking away their chance to have a voice and genuine representation.”*

### Forced Conscription

The junta’s campaign of forced conscription is a serious crisis. Entire villages are being emptied of their young people as military-appointed administrators and armed troops conduct raids, night checks, and roadside arrests. Conscription training now happens every month, and as the Junta moves closer to its planned sham election, the effort to recruit new soldiers has increased. Those detained are rarely released; most are sent directly into service unless they can pay large bribes or have connections with military officials.

A resident of Taung Zune described how the soldiers arrive unpredictably: *“They wait in the evenings when young men are coming home from work. They don’t stay in one place. They move around and arrest whoever they can. Sometimes, they even beat the young men they take.”*

These operations are not limited to young men. Eyewitnesses report that women over 18 are also being taken, particularly during street blockades and door-to-door inspections. A woman from Dawei expressed her alarm: *“They grabbed people right off the main roads and dragged others out of their houses. Some were taken using military call-up letters, but others were taken without any explanation.”*



**Photo:** The junta-appointed Chief Minister of Mon State, U Aung Kyi Thein, has been tasked with overseeing preparations to ensure the regime's planned election is carried out in the state. According to a senior civil servant who spoke to HURFOM on July 29, heavy pressure is being placed on government departments, district and township officials, and even village-level administrators to cooperate.

In many cases, families are left with an impossible choice: pay exorbitant ransoms, often in the millions of kyat, or see their sons sent to the frontlines as expendable soldiers. A resident from Maw Ka Nin explained how the practice has become normalized extortion: *"The army is arresting drug users and small dealers, holding them at the Southeast Command, and demanding money for their release. If they can pay, they're let go. If not, they are sent to forced military training."*

Parents describe sleepless nights as they wait for the sound of soldiers at the door. The fear has emptied villages, silenced markets, and disrupted livelihoods. A mother from Mudon Township captured the anguish felt across communities: *"These are our sons and daughters. They should be in school or building their futures, not carrying weapons for a regime that is destroying our communities. This law has stolen our children's safety, our family stability, and our hope."*

### Digital Repression and Surveillance

As the junta pushes forward with plans for the election, HURFOM has documented an alarming expansion of junta-backed militias and paramilitary forces across Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi region. Far from providing security, these groups are operating as instruments of intimidation and repression. In Mawlamyine, Mon State, militias under the banner of the so-called "People's Security Forces" and allied networks now patrol streets and villages in large numbers. Residents describe them as indistinguishable from criminal gangs: drunk, extorting money, involved in narcotics, and arbitrarily detaining people. Motorbikes are seized at random, young men are dragged from the streets, and those without connections often disappear.

One resident explained: *"They wear blue uniforms and act like thugs. If you meet them at the wrong time, they take you away."*

*“I used to send updates about airstrikes in my area to a group of journalists. Now, with VPNs blocked and surveillance everywhere, I don’t dare now. But it means no one knows what is happening to us.”*

Local youths are being lured into these militias with promises that membership will shield them from frontline conscription. Instead, once recruited, they are tightly controlled and subjected to cycles of abuse. Families report constant fear: celebrations and village events are interrupted, guest lists scrutinized, and bribes demanded in exchange for release. As one villager put it: *“It feels like they run the town - not us.”*

This lawlessness is not incidental. On August 30, 2025, the junta issued a secret order establishing a nationwide committee to arm, train, and supply militias at the ward and village levels. Led by the junta’s Secretary General and key security ministries, the committee is responsible for overseeing recruitment, logistics, and payments for militia members, as well as providing exemptions from conscription to attract recruits. The timing, just weeks after the military’s heavy losses in Shan State and amid collapsing recruitment, highlights the junta’s desperation to turn civilians into enforcers of its authority.

At the same time, the junta is expanding its surveillance programs, particularly through the Pan Khin e-ID project. These digital IDs, embedded with QR codes and biometric data, are part of a centralized population registry that allows real-time monitoring of citizens’ movements. Already used at airports and checkpoints to arrest activists, this system is now spreading into rural Mon villages marked as “election target areas.” One Mawlamyine-based civil society worker explained: *“Local people are already feeling the pressure. These surveillance systems, paired with armed checkpoints and election mobilization, create fear. Even a simple trip to town feels risky if your name or ID is flagged.”*

Together, these paramilitary deployments and surveillance systems reveal how the sham election is being prepared not as a civic exercise, but as a military operation designed to intimidate and control communities. Further, they are not isolated tactics; they are part of a broader strategy and physical crackdown.

As HURFOM documented in August 2025, Mon State has already become an “information desert” due to the junta’s new Cybersecurity Law, VPN bans, and the use of Chinese-supplied surveillance equipment. Civilians face arrest or fines for using VPNs, while their digital IDs enable authorities to track them in real time. The sham election is being built on these dual foundations of militarized ground forces and digital repression.

A source in Ye Township explained: *“In the past, we saw special security forces as well as police at polling sites. Now, it will be civilians in blue uniforms. They’ve only been trained for a month, but they are the ones guarding polling stations.”*



Residents in Paung Township described these squads as omnipresent—manning checkpoints, patrolling roads, and intimidating civilians. Many villagers see them less as security providers and more as tools of repression. Behind this lawlessness lies an official policy. In September 2025, junta authorities quietly ordered state governments to strengthen militia structures, granting licenses for firearms, legal impunity, and privileges for those deemed “loyal to the state.” Local administrators confirm that staff in some departments are being quietly armed.

The effect is devastating. Young people are targeted with false promises: join a militia and avoid frontline conscription. In practice, recruits are trapped in cycles of drug use, intimidation, and control. Families live in fear that relatives could be snatched during routine checks or pressured into paying bribes for release. Rather than creating conditions for a free and fair vote, the junta is weaponizing militias as tools of intimidation, deepening repression and silencing communities. The militarization of civilian spaces not only undermines rights and security in Mon State but also signals the broader climate of fear in which the sham election will be staged.

Across Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region, civilians describe a reality in which fundamental freedoms — speaking, sharing, and accessing information — are increasingly criminalized. A villager from Yebyu Township explained: *“I used to send updates about airstrikes in my area to a group of journalists. Now, with VPNs blocked and surveillance everywhere, I don’t dare now. But it means no one knows what is happening to us.”*

HURFOM monitoring confirms that between January and June 2025, dozens of people were arrested for online activity, including at least 182 in February and 310 in April. Many were accused of “sharing unlawful information” simply for posting or messaging on social media. A legal aid worker in Mawlamyine described the crackdown as: *“An attack on the very essence of human dignity. By denying access to truthful information, criminalizing communication, and stripping away privacy, the junta is violating fundamental rights guaranteed under international law.”*

IDPs and service providers echo similar fears. For them, secure communications were lifelines: a way to organize evacuations, warn about artillery fire, or contact relatives in hiding. With surveillance and SIM card restrictions tightening, people now feel voiceless and cut off. One activist summarized the chilling effect: *“Mon State is becoming an information desert. Without secure communication, people are left voiceless, isolated, and unable to defend their rights.”*

Security measures have tightened across Mon State as the election date approaches, with more inspections and the introduction of advanced monitoring technology. Since September 2025, the junta has increased security checks at city entrances, exits, and intersections. More checkpoints have been set up along main roads, and security forces have focused on inspecting male travellers.

*“Inspections have become extremely strict now. Security is tight at city gates, and there are more checkpoints than before. They use the PSMS (Person Scrutinization and Monitoring System) and upgraded technology. You can see many personnel at the gates. It’s likely because the election is getting closer,”* said a male driver from Mon State.

The PSMS system has been expanded to city gates, road checkpoints, bridges, and intersections. Locals say that as the junta applies this advanced technology, incidents of extortion and arbitrary arrests of travellers have also increased. Security has been strengthened not only in townships where elections will be held but also in nearby areas, with local authorities instructed to arrest anyone deemed suspicious. The PSMS application is restricted to devices approved by the junta. Developed for military security purposes with Huawei's technology, it uses Artificial Intelligence (AI), facial recognition, and centralized CCTV monitoring to track individuals through smart ID cards, phone numbers, bank accounts, and mobile networks.

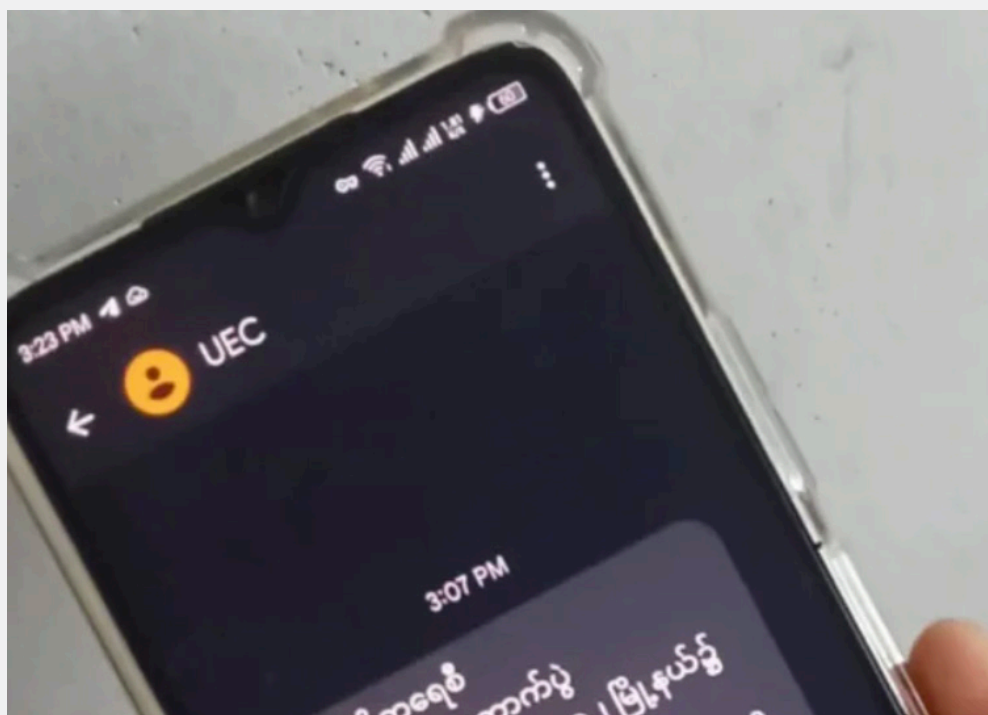
*“They check where you come from and where you go. If your ID shows Ye but you’re in Mawlamyine, they might find it suspicious,”* said a Mawlamyine resident.

Meanwhile, resistance groups have rejected the upcoming election, calling it a sham and vowing to oppose it. Those involved in election-related activities face arrest. Junta-backed Prime Minister U Nyo Saw has also ordered that security be prioritized during the pre-election and election periods. Hotel guest lists and guesthouse records are now being checked, with arrests and extortion reportedly common for those without identification.

Large numbers of troops have been deployed in Ye, Kyaikhto, and Bilin townships, where fighting with resistance forces continues. The Junta's Election Commission has announced that the first phase of voting will be held on December 28, covering 102 townships, including Kyaikhto, Kyaikmayaw, Chaungzon, Mawlamyine, and Thaton in Mon State. At the same time, surveillance is not limited to cyberspace. On the streets, soldiers and militias routinely stop civilians, inspect phones, and fine or detain those found with VPN applications. These patterns of repression, combined with forced conscription and militia expansion, mean that many young people live in daily fear of arrest, disappearance, or being coerced into serving as human shields.

**Photo:**

*The junta-controlled Union Election Commission (UEC) is using state-controlled telecom operators to send daily SMS messages urging people to participate in its planned general election, scheduled to begin on December 28, 2025.*



*Other challenges contributing to the silencing of the people and their fundamental freedoms include the following:*

***Freedom to share and express opinions online***

Residents consistently report that they are unable to share or post online freely. Even simple comments or forwarding messages risk arrest. “I don’t dare write anything now,” said a university student from Mawlamyine. “One wrong word, and they come to your house at night.”

***Restrictions by local authorities***

Authorities do not protect free expression—they restrict it. Local administrators enforce surveillance and search phones at checkpoints. A teacher in Yebyu Township explained: “If they find Facebook or VPN on your computer or phone, they will fine you or arrest you. This is not respect, it is intimidation.”

***Efforts by non-state groups***

Civil society groups, such as HURFOM, women’s networks, and youth collectives, continue to quietly hold awareness sessions. But these are often forced underground due to security risks: “We whisper about rights, not speak openly,” said a women’s organizer in Thanbyuzayat.

***Punishment for free expression/support groups***

Punishment is widespread: arrests, fines, extortion. At the same time, some CBOs still provide small safe spaces. “Only community groups keep us alive,” noted a Karen villager near Kyone Doe.



### *Media freedom and protection*

Journalists are not protected. Instead, laws are used to censor and shut them down. Independent reporters are forced into hiding; some flee abroad.

### *Local media presence and censorship*

Local media outlets exist, but they face significant censorship. “We rely on exile media and radio,” one Dawei resident said. Junta blocks or pressures local news.

### *Arrests, intimidation, and violence against journalists*

Reporters face harassment, detention, and violence. A young Mon journalist recalled: “They told me if I write about airstrikes again, I will disappear.”

### *Internet access and restrictions*

The Internet is cut regularly in conflict zones. Mobile data is blocked at night, SIM card registration is mandatory, and data prices are high.

### *Legal actions for posts/surveillance of communications*

Posting or commenting online leads to legal threats. Locals confirm monitoring of calls and messages. “When I spoke on the phone about missing people, soldiers arrived two hours later,” said a villager from Kyaikmayaw.

### *Hate speech and Misinformation.*

Authorities spread disinformation to justify attacks. No effective responses are in place to protect civilians.

### *Digital rights and privacy*

There is no absolute protection of privacy. “Our phones are not ours,” explained one young man in Ye. “They belong to the military because they can open them at any time.”

### *Freedom of assembly*

Public gatherings are banned or violently dispersed. Even small village ceremonies are restricted.

### *Legal punishment and remedies*

Civilians, activists, and journalists face legal reprisals. There is no fair remedy when rights are violated. Families must pay bribes to secure their release instead.

### *Access to information*

Access is blocked—websites, independent media, and social platforms are restricted. People rely on VPNs, but this carries the risk of arrest.

### *Safety of journalists and access to conflict areas*

Journalists cannot safely report in conflict zones. Some try but face harassment at every checkpoint. No protection plans exist for them. “When bombs fall, we run like everyone else, but we must still take notes,” a Karen field reporter explained.

The junta-controlled Union Election Commission (UEC) is utilizing state-controlled telecom operators to send daily SMS messages encouraging people to participate in its planned general election. According to mobile phone users, notifications have been sent nationwide with links about “Phase 1” of the multi-party election process, covering 102 townships. The messages also pressure displaced people and migrant workers to apply for advance voting by October 12, using Form 15 at the township election offices where they are currently staying. Unable to campaign freely on the ground due to insecurity and a lack of legitimacy, the Commission has turned to phone operators, radio, and state media as its primary tools of outreach. However, the effort is largely falling flat.

A Mon youth told HURFOM: *“On the ground, it is not safe for them to organize campaigns, so they rely on phone messages and loudspeakers. But it doesn’t work. People know this election is only for show — something the junta wants to stage to make it look like they are in control.”*

Residents confirmed that all major networks — Atom, MPT, Mytel, and Ooredoo — have been used to deliver the messages. The majority focus on pressuring displaced people to register for advance voting. Yet, displaced families told HURFOM that they have no interest in the process, as survival remains their top priority. A displaced villager from Kawkareik said: *“No one cares. Maybe abroad, people think advance voting matters, but here, even locals aren’t interested. We are struggling just to live. Some people who don’t understand might be tempted if parties hand out small gifts or money near election day. But for most, it’s meaningless.”*

Meanwhile, voter lists were first posted at ward and village offices on September 30. Despite repeated announcements urging households to check the names, hardly anyone showed up. Observers told HURFOM the reality is apparent: in an environment of fear and repression, people do not want to participate. Still, the UEC may try to coerce participation through pressure and threats in the coming months, further exposing the sham nature of the junta’s planned election.

*“There’s no justice in a military-run election. A fair election is impossible under a dictatorship. This election has nothing to do with the people’s interests. It’s only for the military’s benefit, to secure its power and positions. It’s a fake election meant to show control,”* said a civilian from Dhamma Pala Village, Ye Township, Mon State.<sup>22</sup>

Small business owners, including bar, restaurant, and karaoke shops, are being forced to make payments under various pretexts. Complaints about extortion go unanswered, and instead of taking action, local authorities side with the informers: *“Not only are they ignoring the abuses, but we also have to put up with their intimidation,”* one villager said.

This system is not new. In Mon State, as well as in Karen State and the Tanintharyi Region, the junta has long relied on groups of informers, militia, and loyalists who function like a shadow police force. They are not official soldiers, but they serve as the military’s eyes and ears. Villagers describe them as the junta’s “secret police” because of the way they operate in the shadows, instilling fear and mistrust in communities.

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<sup>22</sup> HURFOM Interview, 6 August 2025

By using these collaborators, the military extends its reach into every ward and village, creating a climate of constant surveillance and intimidation. For ordinary people, the presence of these informers is a symbol of repression. They represent the brutal, hidden machinery of dictatorship — a system designed not to protect communities, but to control them, silence dissent, and enforce loyalty to an illegitimate regime.

In previous years, many informers were forced into hiding after local resistance groups carried out “dalan clearance” operations. But recently, residents say, they have resurfaced with renewed boldness. During the junta’s oversight in Mon State, more than a hundred informers have been eliminated, mostly in areas where resistance forces are active. Still, the fear of these collaborators remains strong, and their abuses continue unchecked, leaving ordinary civilians trapped in fear and exploitation.

### Militarization

Meanwhile, aerial and artillery assaults continue to bring sudden devastation. On 9 August, a junta jet bombed Pein Nae Gone village in Kyaikhto Township, killing 62-year-old U Kyaw Thein and injuring five others. Survivors fled in panic as homes burned: *“It was around nine in the morning when the bomb was dropped. No one had time to escape. One person died instantly, and five were injured. Now, the village is nearly empty—most people have fled.”*

Two weeks later, on 24 August, a monastery in Kyaikhto Township was bombed during the monks’ morning meal, killing two and wounding five. A villager who rushed to the scene shared his grief: *“The monastery is supposed to be a safe place. Instead, they bombed it during the meal. Two monks died immediately. We are very shaken and afraid—if even the monasteries are not safe, where can people go?”*

These testimonies illustrate how the junta’s war strategy has dismantled the very fabric of civilian life. Safe places—such as homes, schools, and monasteries—are no longer considered protected spaces. Families are caught between extortion, forced recruitment, and indiscriminate bombardment. The human cost is profound: displacement, trauma, and a deep erosion of trust in even the most basic community structures.

*“This election is just a path to extend their rule. The military is doing this to prolong its power and create a political path for Min Aung Hlaing to become president. If that happens, they believe the international community will pressure the resistance groups to stop fighting. But for us, the revolution began because we wanted real democracy. If he becomes president, the fighting will only grow more intense,”* said a resistance fighter from the Chaung Nikhwe area, NMSP-administered territory.<sup>23</sup>

The impacts of the violence and ongoing attacks have been devastating. In the Tanintharyi region, where the number of airstrikes tripled in July compared to June, more than 82,800

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<sup>23</sup> HURFOM Interview, 5 August 2025



civilians were displaced by late August. On the ground, armed militias act with total impunity, looting homes and terrorizing communities already under relentless aerial bombardment. Together, these tactics form part of a broader strategy to suffocate civilian life, crush dissent, and create an atmosphere of fear ahead of the regime’s illegitimate election.

*“People reject it altogether. We already resisted once before, and as ordinary citizens. No matter which political party joins, we will not accept the results,”* said a local security member from Kyun Laung Village.<sup>24</sup>



**Photo:** In southern Burma, the lives of hundreds of displaced villagers remain in limbo as junta forces continue indiscriminate artillery shelling.

## Gendered Impacts

Women, often the backbone of communities in crisis, describe feeling doubly burdened. A mother of two from Ye Township told HURFOM: *“We are afraid every day, not only for our children’s safety, but now also of being forced into this election. They came to our ward and told us we had to join, or face punishment. We are just trying to survive, not participate in their lies.”*

Another woman, displaced in Yebyu Township, shared: *“I fled with my children when the shells started falling. Now they say we must join election committees or attend meetings. How can we vote when we don’t even have food or shelter? It is cruel.”*

HURFOM has confirmed another appalling case of sexual violence committed by junta troops in Bokpyin Township, Myeik District, where a young woman was repeatedly raped after being arrested. On September 20, soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 358 forced two married

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<sup>24</sup> HURFOM Interview, 6 August 2025

women from Sakan Thar Village (locally known as Yae Bet Village), under Htawng Sone Ma Hek village tract, to accompany them as guides. The troops were camped nearby in Bodaw Village. According to residents, the soldiers beat one of the women, aged around 30, before releasing her. The other, a 20-year-old woman whose husband was not at home, was taken away and raped multiple times.

*“They took her away deliberately. This was intentional — they wanted to commit sexual violence. She was violated again and again,”* said one villager who asked not to be named.

The perpetrators belong to LIB 358, a battalion notorious in Bokpyin Township for its abuses against civilians. Local people said soldiers frequently burn down houses, loot property from families who have fled, and destroy homes and belongings with impunity. This case is part of a more exhaustive and systematic pattern of sexual violence used by the junta as a weapon of war. Women and girls across Mon State, Karen State, and Tanintharyi have endured rape, sexual assault, and harassment at the hands of soldiers. Survivors are left traumatized, families are silenced in fear, and communities live under constant threat.

The use of sexual violence as a weapon violates both domestic and international laws, including the Geneva Conventions. Yet, under military rule, survivors are denied justice, while perpetrators act with complete impunity.

### Civilian Protection & Accountability

The looming sham election is not just a political exercise — it is a lived reality of fear, coercion, and profound disillusionment for ordinary people across Mon State, Karen State, and Tanintharyi Region. Civilians in conflict-affected communities repeatedly told HURFOM monitors that the junta’s plan to hold elections amidst war and repression is an insult to their suffering.

One resident of Mawlamyine Township shared: *“In our ward, they already picked ten commission members and appointed seven. Most are junta loyalists or ex-officials. We know these elections will not be free or fair. People here don’t believe in them, and I will avoid voting as much as I can.”*

Community leaders and political observers emphasized that the election is designed to entrench military control rather than empower citizens. A former Mon political party member explained: *“Every junta’s department has been tasked to support the election, but in reality, they’re turning into informers, spies, and watchdogs for the junta. Freedom of expression, assembly, and movement are being further crushed. They’re working from now to make sure every ballot is theirs.”*

In Thaton Township, a 63-year-old former NLD party member described the human cost of these preparations: *“The presence of more troops means more danger for us. Young people will be targeted, and abuses will increase. Until the election is over, we feel it will be challenging to live safely.”*

Young people, in particular, remain at the frontlines of fear. One eyewitness from Mudon Township told HURFOM: *“Around 100 youths have been taken already. They are being sent off as recruits. Even women over 18 are among those arrested. Soldiers come into homes pretending to check guest lists, but they’re there to arrest. They close off whole streets in the wards and grab any young person they see.”*

Families expressed despair over the impossible choices they face. As one villager said: *“If we refuse to send a male family member for conscription, we are threatened with having our home sealed. The elections are not about giving us a voice — they are about controlling us through fear.”*

Beyond the fear of violence and forced recruitment, ordinary people continue to voice what they truly long for. A farmer from southern Mon State said: *“What we want is not this sham election. We want peace, dignity, and the end of dictatorship. These elections are just another way for the military to claim power that does not belong to them.”*

Displaced villagers in Yebyu and Thaton not only face airstrikes and forced recruitment, but they are also denied their right to speak about these abuses. *“I used to send updates about airstrikes in my area to a group of journalists. Now, with VPNs blocked and surveillance everywhere, I don’t dare,”* explained a villager. This loss of communication means communities cannot share their suffering, further isolating them as the junta pushes ahead with election preparations.

*“The sham election is simply a lifeline for the dictatorship. This election will be held under the 2008 Constitution. Politically, it will change nothing. It’s simply a way for the junta to stay alive and create a false political exit for itself,”* said a local security member from Kyun Laung Village.<sup>25</sup>

Across HURFOM’s target areas, these testimonies illustrate how the sham election adds another layer of fear and repression to communities already traumatized by war. The voices of women, youth, IDPs, and community leaders are a reminder that the election is not merely illegitimate — it is a direct attack on their dignity, their safety, and their right to self-determination.

*“The election is just a political escape for the junta, not a benefit for the people. But it will serve as a reminder, teaching everyone that this dictatorship has nothing to offer but suffering,”* a resistance fighter said to HURFOM.<sup>26</sup>

### Voices of Displaced Families

Internally displaced families expressed deep frustration. A father displaced from Law Thine village explained: *“We lost our home to artillery fire, and now we live with relatives in Dawei. The military wants us to return and take part in their election. For us, it is impossible. We are not citizens in their system, we are survivors of their war.”*

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<sup>25</sup> HURFOM Interview, 6 August 2025

<sup>26</sup> HURFOM Interview with a resistance fighter, Chaung Nihwe, Liberated area, 6 August 2025

A mother from Kalein Aung, who has been displaced for months, added: *“They want to use our names on voter lists, even though we are no longer in our villages. They will mark the ballots themselves. For us, this election is nothing but another form of displacement.”*

The Mon Progressive Party (MPP), a Mon ethnic political party, has announced plans to contest the Karen State election during the junta-controlled period. Party spokesperson Min Tun Lwin explained that whether the party wins or not depends mainly on voters. However, he admitted that compared to past elections, public interest and enthusiasm for the upcoming polls are extremely low: *“Winning or losing depends on the mindset of the voters — their beliefs and decisions. But this time, things are very different from 2020. The situation has changed, and competition is no longer the same as it was before. As a result, people are less interested. We will still try to reach out and organize,”* he told HURFOM.

He added that ongoing political turmoil and insecurity have created serious obstacles to candidate selection. In some constituencies, candidates are being fielded only to maintain the party’s presence rather than out of genuine competition.

*“We resist injustice with justice,”* said a resistance fighter. *“In this revolution, there’s a difference between fighting with justice and fighting without it. We are resisting injustice through justice. The people will not destroy the election, but they won’t participate either. Even if they go to vote, they’ll just spoil their ballots to fulfill their duty. Whatever they vote for, the junta will automatically control the result. We must continue resisting with conscience and truth.”*<sup>27</sup>

The junta’s Union Election Commission (UEC) has already dissolved four parties — the National Democratic Force (NDF), the Democratic National Party (DNP), the Mon Women’s Party, and the Union Farmer and Worker Party — citing failure to meet membership and office requirements.

Despite these setbacks, the MPP has confirmed it will field candidates in at least three constituencies in Karen State: one Mon ethnic constituency, one seat in Hpa-an Township, and another in Kawkaik Township. The party may expand further depending on the political climate before the deadline.

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<sup>27</sup> HURFOM interview with a resistance fighter, Chaung Nihwe, Liberated area, 6 August 2025



*“The junta wants to use this election to ease international pressure and to show the world that they are still in control, but it’s only a show.”*



Min Tun Lwin also acknowledged growing fears over security: *“Because of the fighting, security is a big concern. We have to take responsibility for our own safety. That is the reality now,”* he said.

The Mon Progressive Party is based in Karen State and was officially registered by the UEC on April 1, 2024, under registration number 48.

### Youth Perspectives

Young people remain some of the most vulnerable. A 20-year-old student from Mawlamyine described his fear: *“The soldiers come at night and arrest people on the streets, in beer shops, even outside schools. They say it is conscription, but it feels like a way to prepare for the election. They want us gone or silent.”*

In Tanintharyi Region, a young activist told HURFOM: *“The junta is desperate. They are arresting us, forcing us to serve, and at the same time saying we must vote. It is not a choice, it is a threat.”*

*“People are living under fear,”* added a civilian who spoke to HURFOM. *“Civilians are under total control of the military. They can force people to vote house to house or set up ballot boxes at checkpoints and make people cast their votes. They’re monitoring anyone suspected of opposing the election. In towns like Dawei, Tharyat Chaung, and Launglon, many young people have already disappeared without a trace. No one knows where they are or what happened to them.”*<sup>28</sup>

### Community Leaders

Local leaders are also speaking out, expressing immense frustration as they try to manage their communities’ fears. The impacts on them have been stressful as they respond to various orders from both sides.

A ward administrator in Mon State, interviewed by HURFOM, explained the pressure he faces: *“They order us to form election committees, but we know this only makes us targets for both the junta and the resistance. We are caught in the middle, trying to protect our people, but with no real power. It feels like we are being forced to betray our communities.”*

Another civil society leader expressed the following: *“There can’t be a fair or free election because everything the junta does is driven by fear and control. People are being forced to comply, and after the election, nothing will change — it’ll still be their rule.”*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Online interview via Zoom, Tharyat Chaung Township, Dawei District, 12 October 2025

<sup>29</sup> HURFOM interview with a Civil society representative, Sangkhla Buri, Thailand, 9 September 2025

*“The junta’s election can never be genuine or democratic. It’s built on the 2008 Constitution, which already favours military control. Even before the Spring Revolution, the military held absolute power. This election is only meant to prolong that. There is no real opportunity for democracy under such a system,”* said a civil society representative.<sup>30</sup>

## *The Psychological Toll*

Beyond the physical dangers, the weight of the sham election is carried in the minds and hearts of people already exhausted by war. Communities across Mon and Karen States and the Tanintharyi Region describe an overwhelming sense of hopelessness, where every new order from the junta feels like another attack on their dignity. A young mother from Thanbyuzayat explained: *“Even when we sleep, we cannot rest. We dream of the bombs. Now we wake up to their election announcements. It is endless fear, and there is no peace in our minds.”*

Displaced families and villagers in contested areas see the sham election as another assault on their dignity. A woman from a camp in northern Karen State summed up the widespread despair: *“Every day we run from airstrikes, drones, and shells. Now they tell us to prepare for their election. How can we think about ballots when our children are starving and dying? It is meaningless. We want safety, not voting under the barrel of a gun.”*

HURFOM’s field reports from August show how civilians in Mon State are caught between relentless violence and forced election preparations. In Bilin, Kyaikto, and Ye, thousands have fled their homes under airstrikes and shelling. Families survive on rice porridge in makeshift camps, while children and the elderly fall ill without access to medicine. At the same time, junta forces are conscripting young men at checkpoints and in villages, sending them to the frontlines as human shields.

A villager from Taung Zune shared: *“They arrest men in the evenings when they return from work. Sometimes, they even beat them. Families only learn of their sons’ fate after they are already conscripted.”*

Against this backdrop of violence and fear, the election is being organized with lists of households and forced compliance. For most people, the ballot box represents not democracy, but another weapon of repression.

*“[The election is] a political escape route for the generals. This is an illegitimate military that seized power by force. Politically, this election is their escape route. Their five-year term is ending, and they are trying to rebrand themselves. Some neighbouring countries, such as Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Cambodia, China, and Russia, might support them, offering some cover. But for the revolutionary side, we see no exit here. No matter how many ballot boxes they prepare, we will resist this fake election,”* said a civilian who spoke to HURFOM.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> HURFOM interview with a Sangkhla Buri, Thailand, 9 September 2025

<sup>31</sup> HURFOM online interview via Zoom (from Tharyat Chaung Township, Dawei District), 12 October 2025

For HURFOM's field teams, these testimonies reflect what they witness daily: villagers trembling when helicopters pass overhead, mothers clutching their children in fear during artillery fire, and young people saying they see no future except more arrests and forced conscription. The sham election is not only a political act; it is a psychological weapon that deepens despair and strips people of the belief that change is possible.

And yet, despite this trauma, communities still speak, resist, and document their reality. Their resilience — fragile but enduring — is what keeps alive the possibility of truth, justice, and a different future.

## RESPONSE BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The suffering of communities in Mon State, Karen State, and Tanintharyi Region is not occurring in isolation. It unfolds under the watch of regional and international actors who continue to fall short of protecting civilians or holding the junta accountable. While local voices call daily for justice, the silence or half-measures of global institutions have deepened the sense of abandonment on the ground.

*“Just as some countries support the junta, others support the revolution. Neither side is free to act as they wish because the war continues. As long as the revolution exists, human rights restrictions on the junta will remain. From our side, the resistance forces will keep fighting until we achieve our goals. The junta wants to use this election to ease international pressure and to show the world that they are still in control, but it’s only a show,”* said a civilian.<sup>32</sup>

### *Legal Repression and the Death Penalty*

On July 29, 2025, the junta introduced one of its most chilling tools of repression yet: the Law to Protect the Electoral Process from Disruption. This legislation allows for life imprisonment—and even the death penalty—for anyone accused of interfering with election activities. Section 27 specifies that if any death occurs during an election-related disturbance, all who are involved “shall be sentenced to death.” A Mon State legal expert called this “an extremely dangerous provision,” stating that *“Anyone even loosely connected to an election-related death could face execution. There are no clear appeal mechanisms. The junta could use this as a weapon against peaceful dissenters or anyone opposing their plans.”*

By weaponizing the law, the junta seeks to protect its appointed election workers, criminalize resistance, and silence communities already living in terror.

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<sup>32</sup> HURFOM online interview via Zoom, Tharyat Chaung Township, Dawei District, 12 October 2025

## ASEAN's Failed Approach

ASEAN has repeatedly promised to implement its “Five-Point Consensus,” but this framework has become little more than a diplomatic shield for the junta. Civilians in HURFOM areas ask why the killing continues if ASEAN truly seeks to end the violence. Instead of halting airstrikes or addressing mass displacement, ASEAN has allowed the junta to participate in forums and dialogues, granting them a false legitimacy while ignoring the cries of survivors.

As one displaced villager in Yebyu Township asked: *“If ASEAN really wants peace, why do they still welcome those who bomb our villages? Do they not hear us?”*

International actors who speak of “inclusive political processes” must reckon with the fact that the junta’s so-called elections are conducted under total surveillance. As HURFOM reported, even private conversations are no longer safe, with civilians fined or detained for VPN use and phones searched at checkpoints. To endorse an election under these conditions is to endorse both physical and digital repression.

*“ASEAN has started paying attention, but the revolutionary groups will do everything to stop this from happening. The resistance won’t focus on the election — they will focus on ending the dictatorship. Once the junta is gone, the fake election will collapse on its own,”* said a local security member.<sup>33</sup>

On 4 September 2025, HURFOM joined 205 regional and international civil society organizations in issuing an open letter to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the UN Secretary-General. The letter urges the UNGA to adopt a strong resolution denouncing the military junta’s planned sham election on 28 December 2025, and to reaffirm support for the democratic aspirations of the people.<sup>34</sup> The signatories also highlighted the junta’s systematic repression of political opposition, including the detention of more than 22,000 political prisoners, the deregistration of political parties, and the enactment of repressive laws—such as the July 2025 “Law to Protect the Electoral Process from Disruption,” which carries penalties up to life imprisonment and the death penalty.

At the same time, the people of Burma are actively building bottom-up federal governance structures through the National Unity Government, National Unity Consultative Council, and ethnic councils established by long-standing resistance organizations. These bodies provide essential services, develop inclusive policies, and represent the legitimate democratic will of the people. The letter calls for these efforts to be recognized and supported.

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<sup>33</sup> HURFOM Interview, Dhamma Pala Village, Ye Township, 6 August 2025

<sup>34</sup> Open letter: UN General Assembly must denounce Myanmar military junta’s sham election, support Myanmar people’s democratic aspirations, Progressive Voice, 4 September 2025



The open letter also called on the UNGA to confirm that Ambassador U Kyaw Moe Tun, appointed by elected representatives, keeps his credentials as Burma's Permanent Representative to the UN. His ongoing representation shows the will of the people and the result of Burma's last free and fair elections election. Finally, the signatories call for the mandate of the UN Special Envoy on Myanmar to be ended, noting its lack of meaningful progress. Instead, they urge the UN Secretary-General to assume a direct leadership role, coordinating global action to end the junta's violence, ensure accountability, and support the people's struggle for an inclusive federal democracy.

As one local security member shared with HURFOM: *"What I want to tell people is simple: don't trust this election. It's not being held for the public's benefit. It's for the junta's own survival. They talk about doing good for the people, but that's a lie. Never trust Min Aung Hlaing."*<sup>35</sup>

### *The United Nations' Weak and Divided Response*

The UN has issued statements of concern but has not acted with urgency. Despite more than three million people being displaced and clear evidence of war crimes, there has been no referral of the human rights situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court. Humanitarian agencies, including the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, continue to work with junta-controlled mechanisms, raising serious concerns of complicity. Aid is too often blocked, manipulated, or used as a weapon by the very forces committing atrocities.

HURFOM has documented cases where UN agencies delivered assistance through junta-controlled channels while IDPs hiding in the forests remained starving and untreated. For affected communities, this sends a devastating message: that their suffering is invisible and that international systems are failing to uphold their own principles.

Global powers have been slow to impose meaningful sanctions. While some restrictions on aviation fuel and arms have been discussed, enforcement is weak. Meanwhile, Russia and China continue to provide weapons and diplomatic cover, enabling the junta to carry out airstrikes and artillery attacks with impunity. Communities in our project areas are painfully aware of this global imbalance.

A Karen youth leader explained: *"The bombs that kill us are made outside our country. If the world wanted, they could stop selling to the junta tomorrow. But they don't."*

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<sup>35</sup> HURFOM Interview — Local security member, Kyun Laung Village, 6 August 2025

## CONCLUSION

While the junta's leaders speak of democracy and civilian rule, the reality in HURFOM's target areas is starkly different. Communities are traumatized by relentless airstrikes, artillery fire, and forced recruitment. Displacement continues daily. To describe such an environment as suitable for voting is not only misleading but also deeply harmful. What is unfolding is not a democratic process but an extension of the junta's war against its own people. The structures and mechanics of this sham election are carefully orchestrated to project legitimacy abroad while tightening control over communities at home. For civilians in Mon and Karen States and the Tanintharyi region, there is no choice—only coercion, exclusion, and survival under military rule.

As the junta advances with its sham election scheduled for December 28, 2025, the absence of a substantial international response risks allowing them to claim legitimacy. This election does not represent a step towards democracy but serves as a tool to extend military rule. By not outright rejecting it, regional and global actors risk becoming complicit in overriding the people's will.

Suppose ASEAN, the UN, and powerful governments continue to ignore the courage of local actors. In that case, they risk enabling the junta's crimes and betraying the very people struggling to build a future free of tyranny. The message from the ground is clear: the sham election must be rejected outright, and international actors must align themselves with the aspirations of Burma's people rather than the lies of the junta.

Therefore, HURFOM urges ASEAN, the UN, and international governments to break the cycle of empty promises. Communities across Burma are not merely seeking sympathy; they demand urgent action: a referral to the International Criminal Court, an enforced arms embargo, sanctions on aviation fuel, and meaningful engagement with the NUG, EROs, and community-based groups who are building governance from the ground up. The international community must recognize that delay is complicity.

Every day without decisive action allows the military to bomb more villages, arrest more young people, and push forward its sham election in December as though the will of the people does not exist. Donors and global actors who hesitate to take a stand risk enabling the very violence they claim to condemn. Communities in HURFOM targeted areas have been clear: they want justice, protection, and recognition of their struggle for dignity. The cost of inaction is measured not in words but in lives lost. History will remember who chose silence, and who stood with the people of Burma when it mattered most.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *To International Governments and International Agencies*

- **Impose Targeted Sanctions:** Increase sanctions against military leaders and entities directly involved in human rights abuses and target key financial sources supporting the junta's operations, including extracting and selling natural resources in Burma.
- **Advocate for a Global Arms Embargo:** Support a comprehensive arms embargo on Burma to prevent the junta from acquiring weapons used in attacks against civilians and ethnic minority areas.
- **Promote International Accountability Mechanisms:** Encourage the establishment of an international tribunal or support the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in investigating and prosecuting human rights violations committed by the junta. Engage with organizations such as the UN Human Rights Council to advocate for independent investigations into human rights violations.
- **Support Cross-Border Aid Delivery:** Collaborate with humanitarian organizations to deliver aid across borders, as many areas in conflict zones remain inaccessible—direct resources to trusted local organizations that can reach these communities.
- **Pressure for Independent Monitoring of the Census:** Given the concerns regarding the current junta-led census, advocate for international monitoring to ensure transparency and to protect ethnic minority populations from being misrepresented or targeted.

### *To Humanitarian Donors*

- **Increase Funding for Local Organizations:** Allocate funds to community-based organizations (CBOs), such as the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), which has on-the-ground access and established networks to support victims of forced conscription, displacement, and violence.
- **Support Mental Health and Trauma Services:** Recognize the psychological toll of the conflict on civilians, particularly children. Donors must fund programs aimed at providing mental health support for trauma recovery.
- **Provide Resources for Civilian Protection Measures:** Fund initiatives that help local communities build bomb shelters, secure safe spaces, and implement early warning systems to protect themselves from sudden attacks.

### *To the National Unity Government*

- **Strengthen Diplomatic Outreach:** Increase efforts to garner support from ASEAN countries and other regional partners. Position the NUG as a legitimate government committed to democratic values and the protection of ethnic minorities.
- **Enhance Communication with Ethnic Groups:** Foster strong, unified alliances with ethnic

armed organizations and civil society groups. Emphasize a commitment to federalism and respect for the rights of ethnic minorities in a future democratic Burma.

- **Establish Civilian Safe Zones:** If and when possible, the NUG must work with ethnic armed organizations to designate and protect civilian safe zones in collaboration with international observers. This could help mitigate displacement and casualties from ongoing military actions.

### *To Other Stakeholders*

- **Raise Awareness and Advocate for Media Coverage:** Encourage international media to continue reporting on the situation, highlighting the junta's actions, particularly the targeting of ethnic minorities, forced conscription, and restrictions on movement.
- **Promote Digital Literacy and Secure Communication:** Provide resources for digital security training to help civilians and activists protect their communications and data from junta surveillance, especially as monitoring increases in southeastern Burma.
- **Support Education on Risks of Unexploded Ordinance:** Fund educational initiatives to raise awareness about the dangers of unexploded artillery and landmines left in conflict areas, which continue to pose significant risks to civilians, especially children.





# *“Voting under the barrel of a gun,”* A Country At War, Not At the Polls

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A Report by: The Human Rights Foundation of Monland

