



Chin Human Rights Organization

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PRESS RELEASE: for immediate release

Caught in the crossfire:

Chin civilians bear brunt of conflict in Paletwa, Chin State

[Chiang Mai, Thailand] The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) today condemned both the Arakan Army (AA) and the Burma Army for human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, in the context of recent outbreaks of conflict between the two sides in Paletwa, southern Chin State.

CHRO urged the authorities to cooperate with UN agencies and the international community to provide much-needed humanitarian assistance to more than 350 Khumi Chin internally-displaced persons (IDPs), who will run out of food supplies before the end of this month.

CHRO's briefing published today describes how the community of Khumi Chin indigenous people were forced to flee when their village of Pyin So – where there is a Burma Army military outpost - came under direct attack by the Arakan Army at the end of March.

Around 6pm on 28 March, about 40 armed soldiers from non-ceasefire ethnic armed group the Arakan Army approached the village. On their way to the village they detained 8 Khumi Chin men, two of whom managed to escape and were able to warn the villagers of the impending attack. The eight Burma Army soldiers stationed there left their outpost and took up positions around the village. Fighting broke out late that night, and again early the next morning, and Burma Army Captain Kyaw Htet Aung was killed. After the Arakan Army effectively seized control of the village, they ordered the Pyin So villagers to dig a grave and bury the body of the Captain. Another ten men were forcibly taken by the Arakan Army to porter their loads for them to the border with Bangladesh.

The primary school in the village was destroyed in the fighting, as well as the school teacher's hostel and two other homes. The roofs were heavily damaged and the properties are riddled with bullet holes. Both the Burma Army and the Arakan Army have allegedly laid landmines around Pyin So village.

In the lead-up to the outbreak of conflict, CHRO also documented two cases of child soldier recruitment and one of forced recruitment by the Burma Army in the Paletwa area, and locals reported an increase in troop movement.

“This is yet another case where ordinary civilians, this time Khumi Chin indigenous people, bear the brunt of armed conflict in Burma and suffer human rights violations,” said Rachel Fleming, CHRO’s Advocacy Director. “The long-standing pattern of abuses hasn’t stopped; in fact we see it escalating in the Paletwa area.”

Alleged abduction

On the evening of 28 March, Ling Min လိန့်မင်း (aka Leing Mang in the Khumi Chin language), a 30 year-old father of two from Pyin So village, left home at around 5pm to go out hunting. His usual hunting spot was near a fruit-bearing tree which attracted animals, in the same area where the other Pyin So men were detained by the Arakan Army later that evening. Ling Min did not return home that night and has not been seen since. Based on the fact that Ling Min was hunting in the area close to where the other men were detained by the AA, CHRO believes that he has either been abducted by the Arakan Army to serve as a guide or porter, or may have been killed by the AA.

All armed forces involved in an armed conflict, including non-state armed groups such as the Arakan Army, must abide by the rules of international humanitarian law. Arbitrary detention, abusive forced labour, and enforced disappearance are expressly prohibited under international humanitarian law. If the Arakan Army are holding Ling Min, they must release him immediately.

“Ling Min’s disappearance has caused huge anguish to his family and to the Pyin So community as a whole. We are calling on the police to launch a search for him,” said Rachel Fleming. “There also needs to be an independent, impartial investigation to determine what happened to him, and his family must be kept fully informed at every step of the way. Those responsible must be held accountable.”

End pressure to return

CHRO’s briefing highlights how the IDPs have come under considerable pressure to return to Pyin So village by the local Burma Army Tactical Commander, Chin State Minister for Forestry and Mining, and Paletwa Township Administrator, even though landmines have reportedly been laid in the area.

“The pressure from the authorities to return home violates the rights of the IDPs,” said Fleming. “Instead, the authorities should be consulting with them for long-term solutions, in accordance with the right to free, prior and informed consent. Voluntary return in safety and dignity is a right, not an obligation. And in this case it would require humanitarian landmine clearance and security guarantees from the authorities.”

The 350 IDPs – of whom 141 are children - urgently need food, medical care and medicine, additional latrines, and construction materials.

-ENDS-

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Notes to Editors:

1. According to information provided by [Myanmar Peace Monitor](#), there are two factions of the Arakan Army. One is based in Karen State, and the other has been based primarily in Kachin State, allied with the Kachin Independence Organization. They have the same stated aims but operate separately. The AA faction in Kachin State has been fighting alongside the KIA in Kachin State. 8 of their cadets were killed in the Burma Army shelling of the KIA training school last November. In February, that faction of the AA joined forces with the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Kokang non-state armed group the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), in northern Shan State. This AA faction numbers some 2,000 troops, and opened up a new front in the west of Burma, in Arakan and Chin States in March and April 2015. Hard-line Arakan nationalists would like to claim Paletwa to be part of Arakan State, even though the majority of the population self-identify as Khumi and Mara Chin. Paletwa is primarily accessible from Arakan State, due to poor infrastructure in Chin State.
2. Please see the briefing for legal analysis and the full list of recommendations made by CHRO.
3. For high-resolution images of the IDP camp, please email info@chro.ca