

BURMA BULLETIN

XXXXXXXX A month-in-review of events in Burma XXXXXXXX

ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

Issue 121

January 2017

- Muslim human rights defender and NLD legal advisor Ko Ni is assassinated.
- A video documenting Tatmadaw abuses against Rohingya Muslims surfaces online and goes viral, prompting government investigation.
- Rohingya survivors, including children, tell documenters and media of atrocities committed by the Tatmadaw including killings of children and sexual abuses.
- Burma/Myanmar denies allegations of human rights violations while the international community calls for justice.
- UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee takes a 12-day trip to Burma.
- Burma's government gives digitally-stored "smart" identifications to "confirmed citizens" in Arakan/Rakhine State.
- Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signatories meet with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss the upcoming peace conference.
- The Tatmadaw intensifies its military offensive against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA); at least 4,000 people attempt to flee to China but are pushed back.
- The Tatmadaw finally confirms detention of the disappeared two Kachin pastors after weeks of denial.
- The Tatmadaw files defamation charges against nine high school students for staging a play with an anti-war message.
- Burma faces possible Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) suspension, if it fails to submit its 2017 report.
- Malaysia hosts Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting and urges international intervention to prevent Rohingya genocide.
- Israeli activists resort to court action to stop national export of weapons to Burma's Tatmadaw on human rights grounds.

IN THIS ISSUE

ANTI-MUSLIM STANCE GROWS IN BURMA/MYANMAR

2 Muslim human rights defender and NLD legal advisor Ko Ni murdered

2 Rohingya reports Tatmadaw abuses

3 Burma's government denials

3 International community calls for justice

HUMANITARIAN

4 Malaysia sends food flotilla

DISPLACEMENT

4 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

5 Kachin IDPs forced to flee again

HUMAN RIGHTS

5 UN Special Rapporteur visits Burma

6 Tatmadaw detains two Kachin pastors

6 Muslim ceremonies halted

7 Telecommunications Law

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

8 Still no justice for two Kachin teachers raped and murdered two years ago

ETHNIC AFFAIRS & CONFLICT

8 Discussions of peace conference

MILITARY

10 Burma's President honors Tatmadaw

10 Tatmadaw soldier found guilty

DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE

10 Digital ID Cards tested

PARLIAMENT WATCH

11 Myanmar Companies Act

ECONOMY

12 Rangoon/Yangon's new bus system

NATURAL RESOURCES

12 Burma faces possible EITI suspension

12 Palm oil production in Tenasserim

Division hurts local livelihoods

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

13 Israel sells arms to Burma/Myanmar

13 REPORTS

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Muslim human rights defender and NLD legal advisor Ko Ni assassinated

On 29 January, National League for Democracy (NLD) Muslim legal advisor Ko Ni was shot dead at the Rangoon/Yangon international airport as he returned from a government delegation trip to Indonesia. He had just attended a panel discussion on the situation in Arakan/Rakhine State.¹ Ko Ni was a prominent human rights defender and advocate for constitutional reform and religious tolerance. He strongly opposed Burma/Myanmar's "Race and Religion Protection" Laws, and unfailingly worked for democracy, justice and rule of law.²

Police arrested the shooter, Kyi Lin, but said that more people were involved in the assassination.³ The suspect said that a man called Myint Swe hired him to murder Ko Ni, but did not disclose information on agenda, motive and purpose behind the murder.⁴ Ko Ni's daughter Yin Nwe Khine said that he often received death threats, and that "[a] lot of people hate us because we have different religious beliefs, so I think that might be why it happened to him, but I don't know the reason."⁵ Last year, Ko Ni founded the Myanmar Muslim Lawyers' Association, and strongly advocated for Muslims' rights and religious harmony.⁶ He criticized the anti-Muslim attitude of Burma's Buddhist nationalists and the Tatmadaw's powerful role on Burma.⁷

NLD officials said that the assassination was a "well-planned, fearless conspiracy" to kill a legal expert committed to amend the 2008 Constitution, and to create a new Harmony Bill with provisions on hate speech, hate crimes and discrimination.⁸ Rights groups and UN officials urged Burma to seriously investigate the murder and disclose who was behind it.⁹

Rohingya report Tatmadaw abuses

In January, a video documenting police abuses against the Rohingya minority became viral online. A police official shot the video, showing his colleagues beating defenseless Rohingya villagers in Koe Tan Kauk, Arakan/Rakhine State.¹⁰ In response to public outrage, the government said that the perpetrators would be detained and punished.¹¹

Meanwhile, Rohingya victims and witnesses continued to report that the Tatmadaw committed serious human rights violations against them.¹² Rohingya children in Bangladeshi refugee camps told of atrocities, including how the military burnt their houses and threw their siblings into the flames.¹³ Rohingya women said that they were kidnapped and gang-raped for days, sometimes after the Tatmadaw killed their loved ones.¹⁴ Officials and workers at aid organizations confirmed that they received many Rohingya women raped by the military, but many victims did not disclose the violence

¹ The Irrawaddy (29 Jan 17) NLD legal advisor U Ko Ni assassinated; The New York Times (29 Jan 17) U Ko Ni, a prominent Muslim lawyer in Myanmar, is fatally shot

² The Irrawaddy (30 Jan 17) Police investigate U Ko Ni assassination amid condolences and demands for justice; BBC News (30 Jan 17) Myanmar: leading lawyer Ko Ni assassinated at Yangon airport

³ The Irrawaddy (30 Jan 17) Police investigate U Ko Ni assassination amid condolences and demands for justice; BBC News (30 Jan 17) Myanmar: leading lawyer Ko Ni assassinated at Yangon airport; Myanmar Times (30 Jan 17) U Ko Ni assassination and funeral: live updates

⁴ The Irrawaddy (30 Jan 17) Police investigate U Ko Ni assassination amid condolences and demands for justice; The Irrawaddy (31 Jan 17) Partial police document shows conspiracy behind U Ko Ni killing

⁵ Reuters (29 Jan 17) Myanmar ruling party lawyer shot dead at Yangon airport

⁶ BBC News (30 Jan 17) Myanmar: leading lawyer Ko Ni assassinated at Yangon airport

⁷ Reuters (29 Jan 17) Myanmar ruling party lawyer shot dead at Yangon airport; RFA (30 Jan 17) Prominent Myanmar rights lawyer killed by gunman at Yangon airport

⁸ Reuters (30 Jan 17) Mourners gather for funeral of Myanmar lawyer shot dead at airport

⁹ Reuters (30 Jan 17) Mourners gather for funeral of Myanmar lawyer shot dead at airport; Reuters (30 Jan 17) Rights group, thinktank urge Myanmar to unravel truth of lawyer's murder

¹⁰ The Guardian (02 Jan 17) Rohingya police beating footage: Myanmar government to investigate; The Irrawaddy (02 Jan 17) Police detained for beating villagers in northern Arakan State

¹¹ The Irrawaddy (02 Jan 17) Police detained for beating villagers in northern Arakan State

¹² Dhaka Tribune (13 Jan 17) Survivors claim Myanmar army taking away young Rohingya women as sex slaves; RFA (19 Jan 17) Interviews: One in three Rohingya women refugees say they were raped

¹³ RFA (23 Jan 17) Rohingya children give eyewitness accounts of atrocities in Myanmar

¹⁴ Dhaka Tribune (13 Jan 17) Survivors claim Myanmar army taking away young Rohingya women as sex slaves

because of shame.¹⁵ Human Rights Watch (HRW) Deputy Asia Director Phil Robertson said that HRW's investigations documented the sexual violence, "yet the government continues its crude denial games rather than seriously investigating".¹⁶

Burma's government denies allegations of human rights violations

On 3 January, the State Counsellor Office Information Committee denied allegations of abuses against Rohingya Muslims and said that propagandists posted "fake news" and photos to discredit Burma's government.¹⁷ On the same day, the national Investigation Commission on the situation in Arakan State released an interim report that downplayed human rights violations as "fabricated rumors and news", and dismissed rape allegations for lack of evidence.¹⁸ The Investigation Commission concluded that there was no genocide/persecution because they saw mosques in the area, and that there was no malnutrition.¹⁹ The final report was due on 31 January, but this deadline was postponed to investigate additional allegations.²⁰

International community calls for justice

Human rights advocates strongly criticized the government's dismissive attitude.²¹ HRW said that the interim report was "methodologically flawed" and "a classic example of pre-baked political conclusions" because it was based on broad assumptions rather than actual investigations.²² Fortify Rights founder Matthew Smith said that a former military general should not lead a commission tasked with investigating the military, and that the interim report contradicted evidence collected by researchers interviewing civilians.²³ On 18 January, 41 Burma civil society groups called for "an international and truly independent investigation" to disclose the truth behind the conflicting narratives.²⁴

On 19 January, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to discuss the escalation of violence against Rohingya Muslims. OIC special envoy to Burma Syed Hamid Albar said that UN intervention was needed to avoid genocide.²⁵ Malaysian PM Najib Razak said that Burma must stop all abuses against Rohingya Muslims, and urged Islamic countries' intervention to stop genocide.²⁶ The Burmese government called Malaysia's organization of the OIC meeting "regrettable", and accused Malaysia of promoting "a certain political agenda".²⁷

On 23 January, United Kingdom (UK) Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson visited Burma to press the government over violence against Rohingya. UK Foreign Office Minister Alok Sharma said that Tatmadaw was responsible for human rights violations.²⁸ On 24 January, Bangladeshi Minister of Disaster Management Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya said that he would investigate allegations of sexual violence reported by Rohingya women in refugee camps.²⁹ Bangladeshi Human Rights

¹⁵ RFA (19 Jan 17) Interviews: One in three Rohingya women refugees say they were raped

¹⁶ RFA (19 Jan 17) Interviews: One in three Rohingya women refugees say they were raped

¹⁷ RFA (03 Jan 17) Myanmar blames fake news reports about Muslims for damaging its international image

¹⁸ DVB (05 Jan 17) Interim report of Arakan fails to impress; Myanmar Times (05 Jan 17) Rakhine Commission releases interim report

¹⁹ Myanmar Times (05 Jan 17) Rakhine Commission releases interim report; DVB (05 Jan 17) Interim report of Arakan fails to impress

²⁰ DVB (05 Jan 17) Interim report of Arakan fails to impress; Myanmar Times (01 Feb 17) Rakhine Commission requests extension for final report

²¹ RFA (04 Jan 17) Myanmar Commission finds no case of genocide, religious persecution of Rohingya in Rakhine; Reuters (05 Jan 17) Myanmar accused of whitewash as panel rejects claims it is persecuting Rohingya; Myanmar Times (05 Jan 17) Rakhine Commission releases interim report

²² RFA (04 Jan 17) Myanmar Commission finds no case of genocide, religious persecution of Rohingya in Rakhine

²³ DVB (05 Jan 17) Interim report of Arakan fails to impress; Reuters (17 Jan 17) OIC envoy calls for UN intervention to avoid genocide of Rohingya Muslims

²⁴ DVB (18 Jan 17) Calls mount for international probe into Arakan State abuses; Myanmar Times (19 Jan 17) CSOs call for independent Rakhine investigation to alleviate international pressure

²⁵ Reuters (17 Jan 17) OIC envoy calls for UN intervention to avoid genocide of Rohingya Muslims

²⁶ Reuters (19 Jan 17) Malaysia PM tells Myanmar to stop the killing of Rohingya, as Muslims meet; Malaysian Prime Minister wants Myanmar to stop violence, discrimination against Rohingya

²⁷ Reuters (21 Jan 17) Myanmar rebuffs Malaysia for organizing OIC meeting on Rohingya

²⁸ The Guardian (19 Jan 17) Boris Johnson urged to press Aung San Suu Kyi over Rohingya on Myanmar trip

²⁹ RFA (24 Jan 17) Bangladesh official voices regret over report on rapes of Rohingya women

Commission chairman Kazi Reazul Haq said that “Myanmar is solely responsible for all those incidents”.³⁰

Related developments:

4 Jan: Malaysian counter terrorism official Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay warned that Burma faced a growing threat of attack from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) over the persecution of Rohingya Muslims.³¹

20 Jan: Three more Muslim men were found dead in Padakah village, Maungdaw Township. Their bodies showed marks of violent injuries.³²

HUMANITARIAN

Malaysia sends food flotilla

On 15 December, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Islam Organizations (MAPIM) applied for authorization to send a flotilla of humanitarian aid to Muslims in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships, Arakan/Rakhine State.³³ On 5 January, Burma/Myanmar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested the Malaysian Embassy to block the shipment, and said that any humanitarian aid would be allowed only if approved through diplomatic channels and distributed by the government of Arakan State.³⁴ On 19 January, Burma’s government authorized the food flotilla, but only after MAPIM accepted that the ship would dock in Rangoon/Yangon, and the aid would be delivered by the Burma’s Social Welfare Ministry to both Muslims and Buddhists.³⁵

Other developments:

31 Jan: The World Food Programme (WFP) restarted aid delivery to Arakan State, but the school meals project would not yet fully resume.³⁶

DISPLACEMENT

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh to be sent to desert island

Since 9 October crackdown [see *October Bulletin*], over 69,000 Rohingya Muslims crossed the Burma/Myanmar-Bangladesh border to escape the violence.³⁷ On 11 January, Burma’s diplomatic team began talks with Bangladeshi officials on the “identification and verification process” of stateless Rohingya refugees.³⁸ Burma’s Foreign Affairs Ministry director Aye Aye Soe restated the strict citizenship conditions, and Bangladeshi FM AH Mahmood Ali emphasized that his government wanted the Rohingya repatriated.³⁹

³⁰ RFA (24 Jan 17) Bangladesh official voices regret over report on rapes of Rohingya women

³¹ Reuters (04 Jan 17) Myanmar faces danger from Islamic State militia, Malaysian police say; The Guardian (05 Jan 17) Rohingya plight making Myanmar a target for Isis, Malaysia warns; Reuters (19 Jan 17) Malaysian PM tells Myanmar to stop the killing of Rohingya, as Muslim meet

³² RFA (23 Jan 17) Three more Muslim men found dead in Myanmar’s Maungdaw

³³ DVB (02 Jan 17) Malaysian aid flotilla bound for Arakan ‘not coming to create tension’

³⁴ DVB (06 Jan 17) Aid to Maungdaw trickling rather than “flowing”, rights groups say; The Irrawaddy (9 Jan 17) Malaysia’s food flotilla plans to go ahead despite Burma govt plea

³⁵ Myanmar Times (20 Jan 17) Myanmar, Malaysia agree over aid flotilla

³⁶ Myanmar Times (31 Jan 17) WFP resumes food support in northern Rakhine State

³⁷ Reuters (31 Jan 17) Bangladesh resurrects plan to move Rohingya refugees to flooded island; CNN (31 Jan 17) Thousands of Rohingya refugees may be sent to remote island

³⁸ RFA (10 Jan 17) Myanmar diplomats to begin talks with Bangladesh over Rohingya refugees

³⁹ Reuters (12 Jan 17) Myanmar, Bangladesh agree to start talks on Rohingya refugees

On 26 January, Bangladeshi government said it would relocate Rohingya refugees to Thengar Char, a vulnerable and flooded island in the Bay of Bengal, to prevent them from mixing with residents. Rights groups criticized the relocation plan, and said it amounted to forced relocation.⁴⁰

Kachin IDPs forced to flee again

On 10 January, more than 4,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) fled from Hkau Shau and Zai Awng/Mugga Zup camps in Waingmaw Township, Kachin State, following heavy clashes between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) [see *Ethnic Affairs and Conflict*].⁴¹ Joint Strategy Team (JST) spokesperson Gum Sha Awng said that Chinese police turned away the IDPs who attempted to cross the Burma-China border.⁴² The Chinese Embassy in Burma rejected this claim, and said that Burma local authorities required IDPs not to enter China.⁴³

Gum Sha Awng said that many IDPs headed to Laiza Township, Kachin State, after being turned back at the Burma-China border.⁴⁴ Fortify Rights said that the escalation of violence between the Tatmadaw and KIA had displaced 23,000 civilians in the past weeks.⁴⁵

Other developments:

9 Jan: Humanitarian aid groups said that IDPs in Namtu Township, northern Shan State, faced food and shelter shortages.⁴⁶

10 Jan: Around 150 persons fled to Zayangyi monastery, following clashes between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups in Namhsan Township, northern Shan State [see *Ethnic Affairs and Conflict*].⁴⁷ On 16 January, Zayangyi monastery assistant Sayadaw Wiriya said that IDPs urgently needed medication, food, and blankets.⁴⁸

HUMAN RIGHTS

UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee visits Burma/Myanmar

On 9 January, UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee began a 12-day visit to monitor the human rights situation in Burma/Myanmar because the recent events caused “disquiet regarding the direction that the new government is taking”.⁴⁹ Lee said that she was concerned about reprisals against civilians who spoke their minds.⁵⁰

Lee visited the Kachin State and locals told her that the situation there was “worse than at any point in the past few years”.⁵¹ She could not access Laiza and Hpakant townships, Kachin State, allegedly due to security concerns.⁵² Lee said that she was disappointed because authorities denied access at the last

⁴⁰ BBC News (30 Jan 17) Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh face relocation to island; Reuters (31 Jan 17) Bangladesh resurrects plan to move Rohingya refugees to flooded island.

⁴¹ DVB (11 Jan 17) Up to 4,000 IDPs on the run in Kachin, said aid team; The Irrawaddy (11 Jan 17) Kachin IDPs turned away at China border.

⁴² The Irrawaddy (11 Jan 17) Kachin IDPs turned away at China border; RFA (11 Jan 17) China turns back thousands of Myanmar refugees trying to cross border to safety; Myanmar Times (11 Jan 17) Thousands flee Kachin IDPs camps amid escalating fighting.

⁴³ The Irrawaddy (18 Jan 17) China denies turning back Kachin Refugees; Myanmar Times (19 Jan 17) China denies blocking Kachin IDPs at the border;

⁴⁴ The Irrawaddy (13 Jan 17) Kachin IDPs returns to camps after being denied entry at Chinese border; Myanmar Times (16 Jan 17) Kachin IDPs still lack safe shelter: JST.

⁴⁵ Myanmar Times (16 Jan 17) Kachin IDPs still lack safe shelter: JST.

⁴⁶ The Irrawaddy (9 Jan 17) IDPs face food shortages

⁴⁷ The Irrawaddy (16 Jan 17) Fearing intensified fighting, more than 100 Ta'ang Flee Namhsan

⁴⁸ The Irrawaddy (16 Jan 17) Fearing intensified fighting, more than 100 Ta'ang Flee Namhsan

⁴⁹ DVB (9 Jan 17) Amid rise in conflict, UN's Burma human rights czar visits

⁵⁰ UNOHCHR (20 Jan 17) End of mission statement by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

⁵¹ UNOHCHR (20 Jan 17) End of mission statement by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

⁵² DVB (10 Jan 17) UN special rapporteur denied visits to Kachin State conflict sites; RFA (10 Jan 17) Myanmar authorities prevent UN rights envoy from visiting volatile areas in Kachin State; The Irrawaddy (11 Jan 17) UN Rapporteur blocked on Kachin State visit

minute, and that “reasons given by the State government did not match those given by the Union government”.⁵³

Lee also visited Arakan/Rakhine State and said that, while condemning the 9 October attacks against three border guard posts [see *October Bulletin*], authorities’ response must respect rule of law and human rights. She visited suspects detained in relation to the attacks and found that only one out of 450 prisoners had legal representation, that they did not know their charges, and that many families were not informed about their arrest.⁵⁴ Lee criticized the government claim that villagers burned their own houses on two alternative grounds: to get better houses or to damage the reputation of the government. Lee said that both explanations seemed “quite incredible” and that the government’s dismissive policy undermined its credibility.⁵⁵

Lee concluded that accountability and justice were crucial to the ongoing peace process, and that the government’s commitment to improve lives in Burma must translate into real actions.⁵⁶

Govt denies, then confirms, detention of two Kachin pastors

In January, human rights groups called on the Burma/Myanmar’s government to investigate the case of Dumdaw Nawng Latt and Langjaw Gam Seng – two Kachin pastors who disappeared on Christmas Eve [see *December Bulletin*].⁵⁷ Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) official Zau Ra said that the two pastors were last seen travelling to Byuha Gon military base in Mong Ko, Muse Township, northern Shan State, to facilitate the release of local people.⁵⁸ Amnesty International said that villagers “believe the men have been detained by Myanmar authorities for their role in helping journalists document the destruction of civilian buildings”.⁵⁹

On 10 January, presidential spokesperson Zaw Htay denied that the Tatmadaw detained the two pastors, and said that the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) took them.⁶⁰

On 19 January, the Tatmadaw said that it detained the two pastors because they were suspected of helping KIA insurgents. The military said that the two pastors allegedly recruited new KIA members, gave information about the Tatmadaw to insurgents, and gave false information to foreign journalists to discredit the Tatmadaw’s reputation.⁶¹ The military could not transfer them to civilian authorities for alleged lack of police personnel at the Mong Ko police station.⁶² On 24 January, presidential spokesperson Zaw Htay said that, after one month of detention, the military transferred the two pastors to Muse police station, and charged them under the Unlawful Association Act.⁶³

Muslim ceremonies halted by Buddhist extremists, no police intervention

On 8 January, Buddhist extremists in Rangoon/Yangon forcibly stopped a Muslim ceremony held at the Yangon YMCA to mark the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. Witnesses said that they called the police, but the police did not intervene.⁶⁴

⁵³ RFA (10 Jan 17) Myanmar authorities prevent UN rights envoy from visiting volatile areas in Kachin State; UNOHCHR (20 Jan 17) End of mission statement by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

⁵⁴ UNOHCHR (20 Jan 17) End of mission statement by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

⁵⁵ UNOHCHR (20 Jan 17) End of mission statement by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

⁵⁶ UNOHCHR (20 Jan 17) End of mission statement by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

⁵⁷ The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) Two Kachin pastors remain missing; Human Rights Watch (16 Jan 17) Burma: Kachin Christians feared ‘disappeared’; Myanmar Times (17 Jan 17) Amnesty International starts petition over missing church leaders

⁵⁸ The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) Two Kachin pastors remain missing

⁵⁹ Myanmar Times (17 Jan 17) Amnesty International starts petition over missing church leaders; RFA (17 Jan 17) Rights groups call on Myanmar for details about disappeared Kachin Christians

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch (16 Jan 17) Burma: Kachin Christians feared ‘disappeared’

⁶¹ Myanmar Times (21 Jan 17) Tatmadaw confirms two Mong Ko church leaders were detained; Myanmar’s Ministry of Defense (19 Jan 17) Facebook page

⁶² RFA (25 Jan 17) Myanmar police charge two Kachin Christians with unlawful association

⁶³ DVB (24 Jan 17) Kachin pastors transferred to police, charged with unlawful association

⁶⁴ Myanmar Times (09 Jan 17) Buddhist hardliners halt Muslim celebration

On 15 January, members of the Rangoon-based Nationalist Coalition Group Civil (NCG) stopped a similar Muslim celebration in Pyay Township, Bago Division. Civil society organizations called for legal action against NCG members. Police said that it was preparing to file a lawsuit.⁶⁵

Burma's notorious Telecommunications Law: More developments

6 Jan: Tamwe Township Court granted bail to Eleven Media Group (EMG) CEO and chief editor. The charges under section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law still stand, despite EMG's apology [see *December Bulletin*].⁶⁶

17 Jan: Kamaryut Township Court denied bail to National League for Democracy (NLD) member Myo Yan Naung Thein, detained under section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law for criticizing Tatmadaw Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing and other officials about the Tatmadaw campaign in Arakan State.⁶⁷

17 Jan: Police arrested transgender beauty queen Myo Ko Ko San in relation to Facebook celebrity gossip. On 20 January, the Yankin Township Police, Rangoon/Yangon Division, released her for lack of evidence. On 23 January, she asked for a public apology.⁶⁸

22 Jan: Protesters met in Mahabandoola Park, Rangoon, to show solidarity against section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law.⁶⁹

Other developments:

22 Dec: Mandalay Division Court rejected the appeal submitted for Pwint Phyu Latt and Zaw Zaw Latt, two interfaith activists sentenced under the Unlawful Association Act and Immigration Act for pictures taken during a charity journey in Kachin and Mizoram states.⁷⁰

7 Jan: The All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) called for the release of its leader Min Htay, detained under the Unlawful Association Act.⁷¹ ABSDF vice chairperson Myo Win said that this detention "undermines the current peace building process".⁷²

9 Jan: Nine high school students staged a play with an anti-war message during a peace discussion in Bassein/Pathen Township, Irrawaddy/Ayeyarwady Division. On 17 January, the Tatmadaw sued them under defamation charges.⁷³

13 Jan: Sittwe Township Court denied bail to human rights activist Khine Myo Htu, despite his health problems.⁷⁴

21 Jan: Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) briefly detained 35 Thai tourists in Payathonzu village, Karen/Kayin State, as retaliation to a Thai police operation that arrested six sex workers.⁷⁵

⁶⁵ The Irrawaddy (18 Jan 17) Action to be taken against dozen who disrupted Muslim ceremony in Pyay

⁶⁶ DVB (06 Jan 17) Thrice denied, Eleven Media defendants granted bail

⁶⁷ Myanmar Times (18 Jan 17) U Myo Yan Naung Thein won't apply for bail again

⁶⁸ DVB (23 Jan 17) Transgender beauty queen demands apology for wrongful arrest

⁶⁹ Myanmar Times (23 Jan 17) Demonstrators take aim at section 66(d)

⁷⁰ The Irrawaddy (07 Jan 17) Appeal rejected for jailed interfaith activists

⁷¹ The Irrawaddy (02 Jan 17) Burma Army detains ABSDF member; DVB (09 Jan 17) ABSDF calls for release of comrade Min Htay;

⁷² The Irrawaddy (09 Jan 17) ABSDF criticizes Burma army's arrest of leader

⁷³ The Irrawaddy (23 Jan 17) Burma army sues students for defamation; DVB (25 Jan 17) Military to sue 9 schoolchildren for defamation

⁷⁴ The Irrawaddy (17 Jan 17) Human rights activist denied bail again in Arakan State

⁷⁵ Bangkok Post (23 Jan 17) Dozens of Thai tourists released after brief detention by Karen BGF

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Still no justice for two Kachin teachers raped and murdered two years ago

On 19 January, memorial services for two Kachin teachers, Maran Lu Ra and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin, were held in Rangoon/Yangon, Muse, Kutkai and Myitkyina townships.⁷⁶ They were raped and murdered in 2015 in Kaung Kha village, Muse Township, northern Shan State, but investigations into the crime stalled.⁷⁷ Rights group organizations called for justice, and said the National League for Democracy (NLD) government must end impunity for sexual violence.⁷⁸

Other developments:

2 Jan: The Rangoon Police Force said that reported rape cases in the city more than doubled in 2016.⁷⁹

3 Jan: Women's rights groups said that female participation in the peace process was crucial, and that protection from sexual violence must be implemented.⁸⁰

ETHNIC AFFAIRS AND CONFLICT

NCA signatories and State Counsellor discuss the upcoming peace conference

On 23 January, the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) — a committee representing the eight 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signatories — met separately with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Tatmadaw Chief Sr Gen Ming Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw to call for a unilateral ceasefire in Burma/Myanmar's northern conflict zones.⁸¹ Both the State Counsellor and the Tatmadaw Chief did not give any official response to the ceasefire demand.⁸² Other issues discussed in the meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi included the follow-up Panglong peace conference to be held at the end of February 2017.⁸³ On 24 January, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) — an alliance composed of the seven non-signatories to the NCA — reiterated that they would join the upcoming Panglong peace conference only if all seven member groups were invited as participants, not observers.⁸⁴ In September 2016, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) left the Second Panglong peace conference after one day because they were given only "observer" nametags [see *September Bulletin*].

Aside from negotiations with the UNFC, the government needs to hold talks with the Northern Alliance groups engaged in conflict in northern Shan State [see *November* and *December Bulletin*]. The Northern Alliance groups reiterated their request to hold talks with the government with the inclusion of the UWSA, following their meeting with China's Special Envoy for Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang.⁸⁵

On 10 January, Sun Guoxiang met with Tatmadaw Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing who said that demanding rights through armed struggle would not succeed under Burma's democratic transition.⁸⁶ Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing emphasized the importance of participating in peace talks without "international pressure".⁸⁷

⁷⁶ Myanmar Times (20 Jan 17) Calls for justice on anniversary of teachers' murders

⁷⁷ The Irrawaddy (19 Jan 17) Two years on, investigation into double murder of Kachin teachers has stalled

⁷⁸ The Irrawaddy (19 Jan 17) Two years on, investigation into double murder of Kachin teachers has stalled; Myanmar Times (20 Jan 17) Calls for justice on anniversary of teachers' murders

⁷⁹ The Irrawaddy (2 Jan 17) Reported rape cases doubled in 2016

⁸⁰ DVB (3 Jan 17) Advocates push for more women's voices in peace process

⁸¹ The Irrawaddy (24 Jan 17) NCA Signatories Push Army Chief to Halt Clashes with Northern Alliance

⁸² The Irrawaddy (24 Jan 17) NCA Signatories Push Army Chief to Halt Clashes with Northern Alliance

⁸³ The Irrawaddy (24 Jan 17) State Counselor, NCA Signatories Meet to Increase Peace Cooperation

⁸⁴ The Irrawaddy (25 Jan 17) UNFC Won't Attend Peace Conference as 'Observers'

⁸⁵ The Irrawaddy (20 Jan 17) China Asks for a Halt to Fighting in Burma During Chinese New Year

⁸⁶ The Irrawaddy (10 Jan 17) Burma Army Chief Calls for Peace Talks Without 'International Pressure'

⁸⁷ The Irrawaddy (10 Jan 17) Burma Army Chief Calls for Peace Talks Without 'International Pressure'

Meanwhile, the fighting continues

4 Jan: Renegade troops once loyal to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA-Buddhist) detonated roadside explosives to ambush the 118th Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) near Kyonhtaw Waterfall, a local tourist attraction in Hlaingbwe, Karen State.⁸⁸

8 Jan: The Tatmadaw seized four more bases from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Waingmaw Township, Kachin State, by using ground and air forces.⁸⁹ At least 4,000 people fled to China but were pushed back across the border to Kachin State [see *Displacement*].⁹⁰ The Tatmadaw intensified its military offensive and took seven KIA bases in total, including strategic mountain posts in Laing Paung and Gideon, in December [see *December Bulletin*].

10 Jan: The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) attacked two Tatmadaw bases in Namhsan, northern Shan State.⁹¹ The Tatmadaw reportedly used an artillery shell, killing two people and injuring eight others.⁹² The Ministry of Defense denied responsibility for the deaths and said that TNLA soldiers fired the shell.⁹³ More than 100 ethnic Ta'ang fled and took refuge in monasteries in Lashio [see *Displacement*].⁹⁴

11 Jan: NCA Signatory Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) attacked bases of the non-signatory Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) as part of a territorial dispute in Dawei Township, Tenasserim Division.⁹⁵ On 25 January, the two ethnic armed groups reached an agreement after mediations by the regional government, and agreed to determine boundaries in a second meeting.⁹⁶

18 Jan: The Tatmadaw troops from Brigade 88 and military operation command headquarters (MOC) captured the 12th Battalion of the KIA's 3rd Brigade in Mansi Township, Bhamo District, southern Kachin State, as well as two other Kachin outposts.⁹⁷ The fighting forced more than 200 local residents to flee to nearby villages.⁹⁸

19 Jan: The Tatmadaw troops from the 429th LIB ambushed the troops of the NCA signatory Shan State Army-South (SSA-South) on patrol in Loilem District, southern Shan State.

Other developments:

1 Jan: Eighteen youth representatives from 11 states and divisions except Kachin, Karenni and Chin states, participated in a “peace talk” with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw.⁹⁹ The youth representatives said that the discussion was “not satisfactory” and noted that time was limited.¹⁰⁰

3 Jan: A Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) splinter group — also known as the Klo Htoo Baw Karen Organization (KKO) — joined the Northern Alliance groups and moved its troops from Karen State to northern Shan State.¹⁰¹ On 7 January, 23 soldiers from the same group surrendered to the Tatmadaw in Myawaddy Township, Karen State.¹⁰²

⁸⁸ DVB (05 Jan 17) DKBA renegades ambush Burmese patrol in Hlaingbwe

⁸⁹ The Irrawaddy (10 Jan 17) Burma Army Seizes Four KIA Bases

⁹⁰ Myanmar Times (12 Jan 17) Thousands flee Kachin IDP camps amid escalating fighting

⁹¹ The Irrawaddy (11 Jan 17) TNLA Attacks Burma Army Bases in Namhsan

⁹² The Irrawaddy (13 Jan 17) Two Civilians Killed by Artillery Strike in Namhsan; Myanmar Times (17 Jan 17) Namhsan IDPs in dire need of supplies

⁹³ The Irrawaddy (13 Jan 17) Two Civilians Killed by Artillery Strike in Namhsan

⁹⁴ The Irrawaddy (16 Jan 17) Fearing Intensified Fighting, More Than 100 Ta'ang Flee Namhsan

⁹⁵ The Irrawaddy (12 Jan 17) Mon and Karen Armed Groups Clash, Wounding Four Soldiers

⁹⁶ Myanmar Times (26 Jan 17) KNU and NMSP agree to stop fighting

⁹⁷ RFA (19 Jan 17) Myanmar Military Captures Key Ethnic Army Command Base in Kachin State; DVB (19 Jan 17) Burmese army captures 3 bases from Kachin rebels;

⁹⁸ RFA (19 Jan 17) Myanmar Military Captures Key Ethnic Army Command Base in Kachin State

⁹⁹ The Irrawaddy (02 Jan 17) Youth Representatives Dissatisfied with Peace Talk with State Counselor

¹⁰⁰ The Irrawaddy (02 Jan 17) Youth Representatives Dissatisfied with Peace Talk with State Counselor

¹⁰¹ The Irrawaddy (03 Jan 17) DKBA Splinter Group Joins Northern Alliance

¹⁰² The Irrawaddy (09 Jan 17) More Than Twenty DKBA Splinter Group Soldiers Surrender

5 Jan: Public consultations ahead of Burma's national level political dialogue started in Dawei, Tenasserim Division.¹⁰³

6 Jan: The International Crisis Group (ICG) ranked Burma as 8th out of the 10 "world's most volatile flashpoints". The list is jointly headed by Syria and Iran, followed by Turkey, Yemen, Greater Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. Burma is listed between Afghanistan and Ukraine, while Mexico was ranked last.¹⁰⁴

24 Jan: Burmese businessmen, including Khin Shwe, chairman of Zaykabar Company Ltd, raised more than K11 billion (US\$8 million) for the National Reconciliation and Peace Center's Peace Fund, within two weeks of the government calling for public donations.¹⁰⁵ Zaykabar Company Ltd. is a Burmese conglomerate that has interests in construction and telecommunications and is known for land grabs.¹⁰⁶

MILITARY

Burma/Myanmar's President criticized for honoring Tatmadaw soldiers

On 4 January (Independence Day), President Htin Kyaw presented various state honors to 400 soldiers, including the honorific titles of "Thiha Thura" and "Thura" to 15 Tatmadaw soldiers for their bravery.¹⁰⁷ On the same day, Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Snr Gen Min Aung Hling said that government troops must continue to engage in military action because some ethnic armed group leaders are "narrow-minded" in their approach to peace.¹⁰⁸

Critics said that the move was insensitive, as the Tatmadaw fought with ethnic people while the government engaged in the peace process with ethnic armed groups.¹⁰⁹ United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) Vice-Chairman Nai Hong Sar said that he feared fighting would intensify after the government's recognition of the Tatmadaw.¹¹⁰

Military court finds a Tatmadaw soldier guilty for student's death

On 5 January, a military court in Myitkyina, Kachin State, sentenced Pvt Maung Maung to two years in jail with hard labor for killing a 19-year old student in June 2016 after an argument between soldiers guarding Bala Min Htin Bridge and a group of Kachin men.¹¹¹ The victim's family was not satisfied with the light sentence and would file further complaints in accordance with the law.¹¹²

DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE

Digital ID Cards tested in Arakan/Rakhine State

On 9 January, Burma/Myanmar's government began a pilot project to replace paper-based National Registration Cards (NRCs) with digitally-stored "smart" identification cards in Sittwe, Arakan/Rakhine State.¹¹³ On 10 January, the project was extended to Buthidaung Township, Arakan State.¹¹⁴ The project would be rolled out in Maungdaw Township in the upcoming days.¹¹⁵

¹⁰³ The Irrawaddy (05 Jan 17) Public Consultations Precede National Level Dialogue in Dawei

¹⁰⁴ International Crisis Group (05 Jan 17) 10 Conflicts to Watch in 2017

¹⁰⁵ RFA (26 Jan 17) Myanmar Crony Raises Millions of Dollars for Country's Peace Process; The Irrawaddy (24 Jan 17) Burmese Tycoons Contribute \$8 Million to Govt Peace Fund

¹⁰⁶ RFA (26 Jan 17) Myanmar Crony Raises Millions of Dollars for Country's Peace Process;

¹⁰⁷ The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) President Criticized for Honoring Govt Soldiers Amid Ongoing Conflict

¹⁰⁸ The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) Burma Army Chief: Some Ethnic Leaders Are 'Narrow-Minded'

¹⁰⁹ The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) President Criticized for Honoring Govt Soldiers Amid Ongoing Conflict

¹¹⁰ The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) President Criticized for Honoring Govt Soldiers Amid Ongoing Conflict

¹¹¹ The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) Burma Army Soldier Sentenced to Two Years over Student's Death

¹¹² The Irrawaddy (06 Jan 17) Burma Army Soldier Sentenced to Two Years over Student's Death

¹¹³ The Irrawaddy (11Jan 17) Digital ID Cards Trialed in Arakan State; Myanmar Times (13 Jan 17) 'Smart' ID pilot project rolls out in 4 test areas

¹¹⁴ The Irrawaddy (11Jan 17) Digital ID Cards Trialed in Arakan State; Myanmar Times (13 Jan 17) 'Smart' ID pilot project rolls out in 4 test areas

¹¹⁵ The Irrawaddy (11Jan 17) Digital ID Cards Trialed in Arakan State; Myanmar Times (13 Jan 17) 'Smart' ID pilot project rolls out in 4 test areas

Arakan State's Immigration Department Dir Gen Aye Lwin said that people involved in the pilot project would be "scrutinized" and only "confirmed citizens" would be given smart cards.¹¹⁶ Both Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships have been facing conflict and displacement after unknown assailants attacked three police outposts and a subsequent "clearance operation" by the Tatmadaw [see *October and November Bulletin*].

Naypyidaw, Mandalay and Rangoon/Yangon regions will also be covered by the pilot project.

Other developments:

3 Jan: Parliamentary Public Complaints Committee Chairperson Sann Myint said that the committee received around 4,000 complaints from the public in 2016, with more than half expressing discontent with court decisions, alleged corruption of judicial servants, and slowness of judicial processes.¹¹⁷ The military-run Ministry of Home Affairs received the most complaints among incidents related to government ministries and departments.¹¹⁸

7 Jan: The National League for Democracy's (NLD) central executive committee formed a new internal evaluation committee, headed by senior party member Win Htein.¹¹⁹ The six-member committee would monitor and evaluate lawmakers and party members throughout the country.¹²⁰ Those Members of Parliament with poor work performance would be given necessary training.¹²¹

27 Jan: Burma ranked 136th out of the 176 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, tied with Nigeria, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan and Guatemala.¹²²

27 Jan: Ma Ba Tha central committee member Maung Thway Chon announced that the Buddhist nationalist group will not accept new amendments to the Race and Religion Protection laws.¹²³ Maung Thway Chon warned that "[t]he government will have to face unwanted consequences and will be in trouble. All the people across the country will come out into the streets if Parliaments dares to try it."¹²⁴

PARLIAMENT WATCH

Amendments to Myanmar Companies Act submitted to Parliament

On 6 January, the Ministry of National Planning and Finance submitted its suggested amendments to the Myanmar Companies Act to the Lower House of Parliament.¹²⁵ The proposed amendments to the Myanmar Companies Act would allow foreigners to buy shares on the Rangoon/Yangon Stock Exchange for the first time.¹²⁶ The draft amendments also sought to simplify requirements for small and family-owned businesses, improve corporate governance standards, and remove outdated regulations.¹²⁷

¹¹⁶ The Irrawaddy (11 Jan 17) Digital ID Cards Tried in Arakan State; Myanmar Times (13 Jan 17) 'Smart' ID pilot project rolls out in 4 test areas

¹¹⁷ The Irrawaddy (03 Jan 17) Judiciary Grievances Top Public's Complaints

¹¹⁸ The Irrawaddy (03 Jan 17) Judiciary Grievances Top Public's Complaints

¹¹⁹ Myanmar Times (20 Jan 17) NLD to measure adherence to election promises; Eleven (20 Jan 17) NLD forms panel to monitor the work of party MPs

¹²⁰ Myanmar Times (20 Jan 17) NLD to measure adherence to election promises; Eleven (20 Jan 17) NLD forms panel to monitor the work of party MPs

¹²¹ Eleven (20 Jan 17) NLD forms panel to monitor the work of party MPs

¹²² Myanmar Times (26 Jan 17) Myanmar makes small gains in annual corruption index under NLD govt

¹²³ The Irrawaddy (27 Jan 17) Ma Ba Tha Resists Reforms to Race and Religion Laws

¹²⁴ The Irrawaddy (27 Jan 17) Ma Ba Tha Resists Reforms to Race and Religion Laws

¹²⁵ The Irrawaddy (17 Jan 17) Amendments to Myanmar Companies Act up for Parliamentary Discussion; Myanmar Times (12 Jan 17) Myanmar Companies Act sent to Parliament

¹²⁶ The Irrawaddy (17 Jan 17) Amendments to Myanmar Companies Act up for Parliamentary Discussion; Myanmar Times (12 Jan 17) Myanmar Companies Act sent to Parliament

¹²⁷ Myanmar Times (12 Jan 17) Myanmar Companies Act sent to Parliament

Rangoon/Yangon launches new bus system

On 16 January, Burma/Myanmar launched the new Yangon Bus Service (YBS) introducing regular bus lines, timetables, and salaries for drivers.¹²⁸ YBS replaced Rangoon's old bus system — the Rangoon Motor Vehicles Supervisory Committee, also known as Ma Hta Tha.¹²⁹ Based on the new system, buses previously operated under the Ma Hta Tha had to register with the Yangon Regional Transport Authority (YRTA) to continue operation.¹³⁰ This resulted in an insufficient number of buses when the YBS was launched, which led to overcrowding, delays and short supply of public vehicles.¹³¹ YRTA secretary Maung Aung said that the government would import more than 1,000 buses in total to fill the gap.¹³²

Other developments:

12 Jan: Burma/Myanmar awarded its fourth and final telecommunications license to a joint venture between Viettel, Myanmar National Telecom Holding Public, and Star High Public Company. This venture is an unusual case of cooperation between businesses controlled by Burma and Vietnam militaries.¹³³ Viettel is a Vietnam's defense ministry-owned telecom company, while Star High Public Company is a subsidiary of military-run Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd.¹³⁴ The firm will begin providing services in 2018.¹³⁵

20 Jan: First Private Bank (FPB) became the fourth firm to trade on the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX).¹³⁶

NATURAL RESOURCES

Burma/Myanmar faces possible EITI suspension in case of failure to submit 2017 report

There are concerns that the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) Board might suspend Burma/Myanmar if it fails to submit its second report by the end of March 2017.¹³⁷

EITI is an initiative designed to reveal how much revenue the government earns from natural resources and their extraction, and the companies involved.¹³⁸

In early 2016, a multi-stakeholder group (MSG) — comprised of government, civil society and private sector officials — was formed to draft and submit the first EITI report.¹³⁹ However, the NLD-led government had still not reformed the MSG.¹⁴⁰ Civil society MSG member Ma Moe Moe Tun said that suspension from EITI would be “shameful”, considering the NLD's commitment to transparency and accountability.¹⁴¹

Palm oil production in Tenasserim Division hurts local livelihoods

A joint report by several local civil society organizations entitled “Green Desert”, revealed that more than 1.8 million acres of palm oil plantations in Burma's southern Tenasserim Division caused land

¹²⁸ Reuters (16 Jan 17) In a first, Myanmar's largest city launches bus network impacting millions

¹²⁹ The Irrawaddy (16 Jan 17) Rangoon Launches New Bus System

¹³⁰ The Irrawaddy (16 Jan 17) Rangoon Launches New Bus System

¹³¹ The Irrawaddy (20 Jan 17) Rangoon Bus Rollout Gets Mixed Reviews

¹³² The Irrawaddy (19 Jan 17) Govt to Import 1,000 Buses to Address Shortage

¹³³ Reuters (12 Jan 17) Myanmar awards fourth telecoms license as mobile market heats up

¹³⁴ Reuters (12 Jan 17) Myanmar awards fourth telecoms license as mobile market heats up

¹³⁵ Myanmar Times (13 Jan 17) Myanmar's fourth telco gets licence at last

¹³⁶ The Irrawaddy (19 Jan 17) YSX's Newest Trading Company Announces Base Share Price

¹³⁷ Frontier Myanmar (27 Jan 17) Stalled progress threatens 'shameful' EITI suspension

¹³⁸ Frontier Myanmar (27 Jan 17) Stalled progress threatens 'shameful' EITI suspension

¹³⁹ Frontier Myanmar (27 Jan 17) Stalled progress threatens 'shameful' EITI suspension

¹⁴⁰ Frontier Myanmar (27 Jan 17) Stalled progress threatens 'shameful' EITI suspension

¹⁴¹ Frontier Myanmar (27 Jan 17) Stalled progress threatens 'shameful' EITI suspension

disputes, damaged livelihoods, destroyed biodiversity, and polluted the environment.¹⁴² The report highlighted the Myanmar Start Prestige Plantation (MSPP) project, with its concession overlapping with 38,900 acres of community and agricultural lands belonging to four villages, which Burma's government incorrectly classified as "vacant land".¹⁴³

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Israelis activists go to court over arms sales to Burma/Myanmar

On 19 January, human rights activists filed an urgent petition with the Israeli Supreme Court, arguing that Israel cannot approve military exports that would be used in crimes against humanity, war crimes, and gross violations of human rights.¹⁴⁴ In December 2016, Israeli human rights activists wrote a letter to Racheli Chen, head of the Israeli defense ministry's export control department, calling for a suspension of weapons sales to the Tatmadaw while it fights a war against ethnic minorities in Shan and Kachin states and violates human rights in Arakan/Rakhine State.¹⁴⁵ On 8 January, the Israeli defense ministry said that it would go ahead with exports of military equipment to Burma/Myanmar.¹⁴⁶

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"Interim Report of the Investigation Commission on Maungtau" President Office, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar <https://goo.gl/GQDR2J>

"Myanmar: Dooplaya Incident Report: Rape and Killing of a teenage girl in Kawkareik Township, August 23rd 2016" Karen Human Rights Group <https://goo.gl/ZC61IQ>

"Myanmar: Hpapun Interview: Naw M---, February 2015" Karen Human Rights Group <https://goo.gl/Af1kRt>

"Myanmar: Humanitarian Bulletin, Issue 4 | October 2016 - January 2017" UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs <https://goo.gl/yAo4Mp>

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¹⁴² The Irrawaddy (12 Jan 17) Palm Oil Projects Destroy Local Livelihoods: Report

¹⁴³ The Irrawaddy (12 Jan 17) Palm Oil Projects Destroy Local Livelihoods: Report

¹⁴⁴ The Irrawaddy (20 Jan 17) Israeli Activists Push Supreme Court to Stop Military Export to Burma

¹⁴⁵ The Irrawaddy (20 Jan 17) Israeli Activists Push Supreme Court to Stop Military Export to Burma

¹⁴⁶ The Irrawaddy (20 Jan 17) Israeli Activists Push Supreme Court to Stop Military Export to Burma