



Karen Peace Support Network

23 December 2021

Urgent humanitarian aid and protection needed for over 10,000 villagers fleeing Burmese Military attacks in Lay Kay Kaw, Karen State, Burma

The Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) is calling urgently for humanitarian aid and protection for over 10,000 villagers who have fled Burmese military attacks in the Lay Kay Kaw area of Dooplaya District, Karen State, half of whom have now crossed the Moei River into Thailand.

The attacks began on December 15, 2021, a day after about 200 Burmese military troops raided the Karen National Union (KNU) controlled town of Lay Kay Kaw, south of Myawaddy, and arrested over 20 people, including a member of parliament and democracy activists who had taken refuge there since the February 1 military coup. When the Karen National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the KNU, tried to protect people from arrest and torture, the Burmese military fired more than 100 artillery shells indiscriminately into the town and surrounding villages, damaging buildings and causing local residents to flee in terror. Attacks are continuing to this day.

Lay Kay Kaw was established as a “New Town” in 2014 under the ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Burmese military, with financial support from Japan’s Nippon Foundation. Tensions between the KNU and the Burmese military have been mounting in the area since September 2021, when the Burmese military troops began conducting raids in Lay Kay Kaw searching for democracy activists. This is the first major Burmese military offensive in this area of Karen State, which is under the KNU’s 6th Brigade, since the 2012 ceasefire.

So far, over 10,000 people from Lay Kay Kaw and eight nearby villages have fled their homes. After trying to seek shelter on the Karen side of the border, about 5,000 have been driven by escalating attacks to cross the Moei River to seek refuge in Thailand.

The Burmese military has been bringing in troop reinforcements and armoured personnel carriers from adjoining regional commands, and fighter aircraft have been flying over the area, instilling fear that aerial bombing will soon begin. It appears the Burmese military is planning to escalate attacks further, threatening the lives of local villagers.

KPSN therefore appeals urgently to the Thai government to give protection and shelter to these new refugees and allow humanitarian aid agencies to access and assist them. We also urge Thailand to allow aid to be delivered to internally displaced people (IDPs) sheltering on the Karen side of the border.

KPSN strongly condemns this latest Burmese military aggression, in violation of their ceasefire pledges to the KNU and foreign peace donors. These donors should immediately cut funding for the failed 'nationwide' peace process and instead provide urgently needed humanitarian aid to displaced communities. Aid to IDPs should be provided cross-border through ethnic administrations and local community organisations, without informing or coordinating with the Burmese military which would jeopardize aid delivery.

We call urgently for stronger international pressure on the Burmese military, including:

1. Imposition of a global arms embargo and sanctions on the supply of aviation fuel.
2. Targeted economic sanctions, including on gas revenue.
3. Deny legitimacy to the Burmese military and do not sign agreements with them for humanitarian and development aid.
4. Hold the military to account for their crimes, referring the situation to the International Criminal Court.

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