

### Airstrikes Threaten Civilian Safety and Security as Dozens are Killed and Injured in Karenni State

#### Overall Analysis:

The situation in Karenni State continues to be **cause for alarm** as airstrikes, in particular, are occurring at an increasing rate, putting the lives of civilians at risk. The end of 2023 marked a **turning point** in the ongoing struggle between resistance forces and the Burmese junta in Karenni state.

The Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) gained **significant ground** after initiating an offensive operation in November of last year - Operation 1111 - against the military. By the end of this first quarter in March 2024, the KNDF and allied forces had **successfully seized control of 65** junta bases, camps, and outposts, comprising approximately **90% of Karenni state**.

However, in response to the KNDF's advances, the junta **intensified its assaults**. Airstrikes are regularly deployed to target not only resistance forces but also innocent civilians. The **repercussions of this escalation** reverberated through the first quarter of 2024, painting a

#### Major Quarterly Developments in Karenni State: January -March 2024

- 29+ Civilians Killed
- 79+ Civilians Injured
- 304+ Damaged Properties
- 150+ Homes and Buildings Destroyed
- 45+ Airstrikes
- 20+ Cases of Mortar Shelling
- 1+ Case of Civilians Shot on Sight

grim picture of the **human cost and destruction** wrought by the conflict.

During the first quarter of 2024 (January to March), at least **29 Karenni individuals lost their lives**, with **79 sustaining injuries** and a staggering **304 structures damaged** or destroyed. The Burmese junta carried out various tactics, including airstrikes, mortar shelling, shootings, drone attacks, and landmines, to instill fear among the local population.

Additionally, reports emerged of junta forces **kidnapping civilians, including women and children, to serve as porters and human shields**, only to later execute them.

While mortar shelling had been the primary strategy utilized by the military in the previous year, this

### Photo Caption:

*Destruction of La-ei Hospital in Pekhon Township, Southern Shan State as the result of an airstrike by the junta on the morning of 27 March, 2024.*

*KnHRG condemned the attack.*



quarter witnessed a shift in approach as they relied increasingly on airstrikes. Community lives and infrastructure have been **devastated by the attacks**. The frequency of airstrikes escalated significantly each month, starting with three recorded attacks in January, rising to over 12 occurrences in February, and exceeding 30 in March.

Overall, there were **over 45 airstrikes** that accounted for the majority of recorded casualties, which tragically included children, teenagers, and the elderly. Structural damage was extensive, with over **150 homes and buildings destroyed** as a result of the airstrikes.

Soldiers were reported to have **dropped mortar shells from the air onto civilian areas**, including internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and villages. Additionally, the junta was seen firing at least four rounds at La Ei Hospital from its aircraft, endangering the lives of medical staff and patients.

**This violence created 3,500 additional IDPs in Hpawsaung and Shardaw towns by the end of the reporting period in March.**

Civilian lives remain at risk as long as the junta has access to jet fuel. As echoed in many campaigns calling for aviation sanctions, if the jets can't fly, they can't bomb. In line with Resolution 2669, adopted by the United Nations Security Council in December 2022, it demanded an end to the violence perpetrated by the junta. The lack of action to hold the regime accountable has only led to escalated attacks as the junta continues to benefit from impunity.

# Human Rights Violations

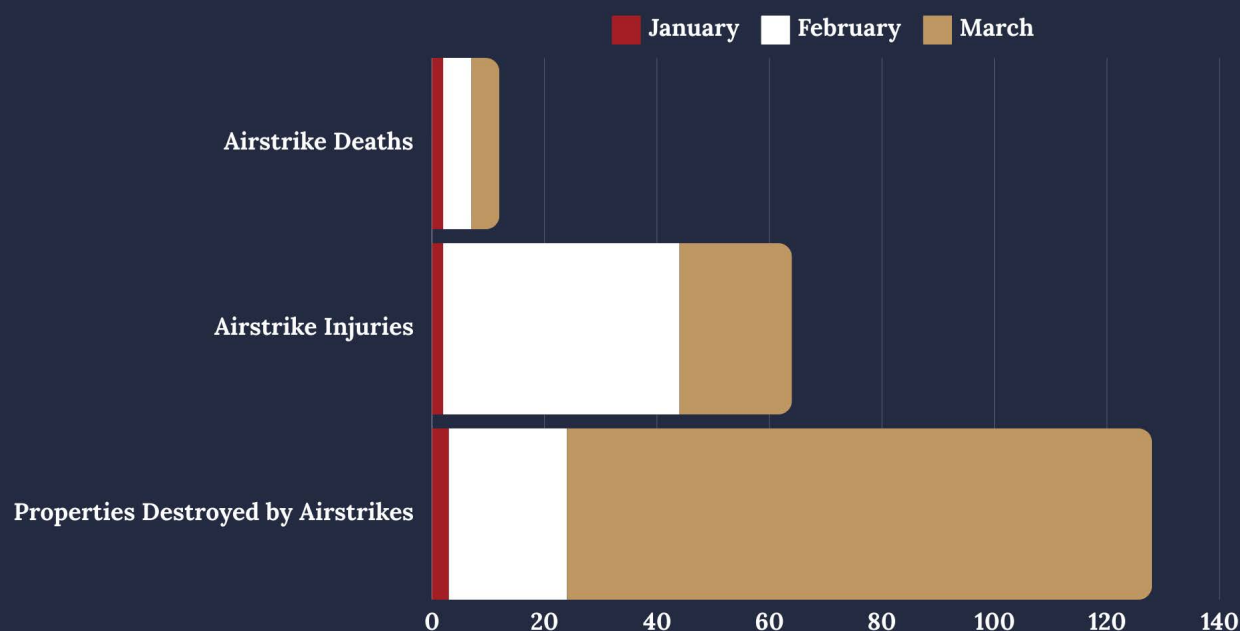
## Airstrikes

In January, there were at least three airstrikes, with two bombs being dropped on IDP areas and another in a field of a village. This resulted in two deaths, including a 50-year-old man in Demoso Township and another Karenni in Southern Shan State. Jet fighters also injured two individuals.

*In addition, the Burmese junta employed four aerial attacks with drones that dropped bombs and targeted civilians.*

There were over 12 airstrikes in February, causing five deaths and 42 injuries. Four men died in the aerial attack on Daw Si Ei village, and the aerial bombing of Loi Nan Pa village killed another man. Additionally, around 22 boys and 22 girls were injured, most of whom were students. At least 21 homes and other local infrastructure - including two schools, two churches, and a rice mill - were damaged or totally destroyed.

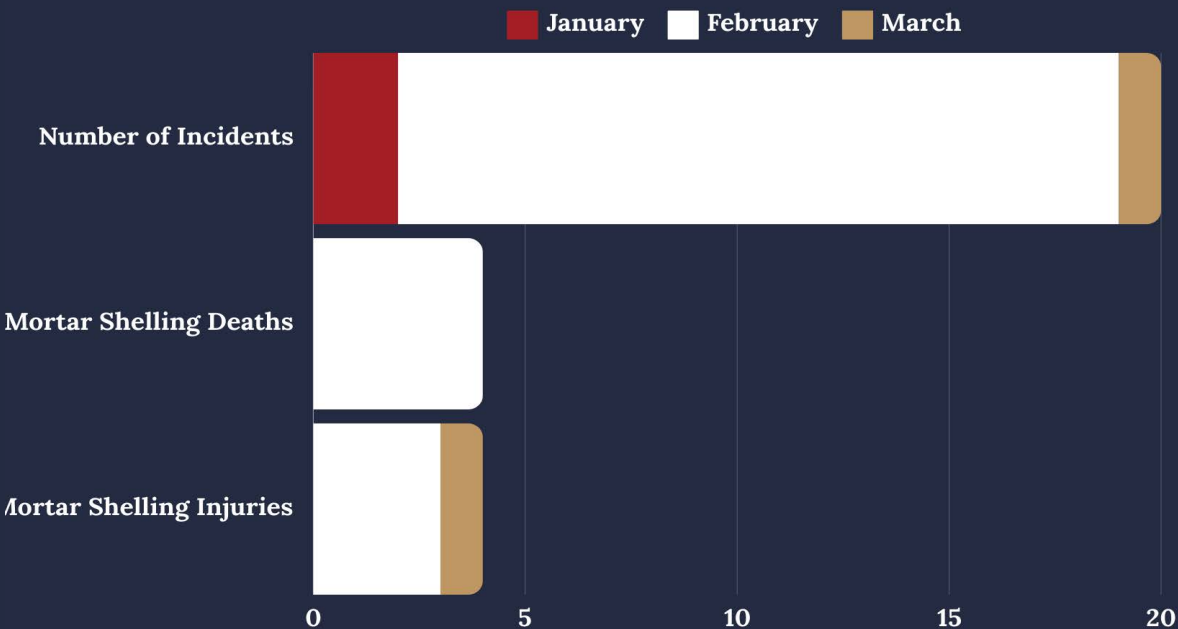
In March, the number of airstrikes exceeded 30, leading to the destruction of at least 150 properties and a total of five Karenni deaths and 20 injuries. It was also reported that junta forces fired upon Pekon La Ei hospital at least four times from the air, killing two from the total death toll - a forty-seven-year-old man and a seventeen-year-old.





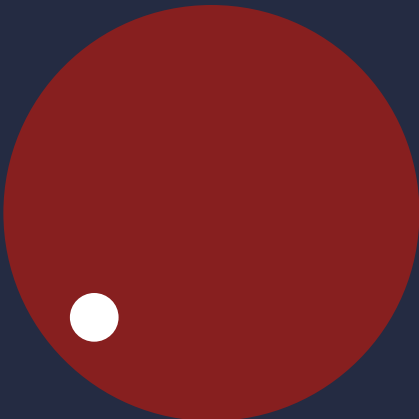
## Mortar Shelling

There were just over two mortar shelling attacks in January, but they soon **escalated to over 17 cases** in February. These incidents took the lives of two women and two children in Phekon, Shwe San village, and injured a man, a woman, and an infant from the same area. In March, a 48-year-old elderly woman was also wounded in Demoso.



*The deployment of mortar shelling by the military junta was the most utilized tactic in 2023, with regular casualties reported throughout the year. Dozens of civilians were killed or wounded.*

## Shot-On-Sight

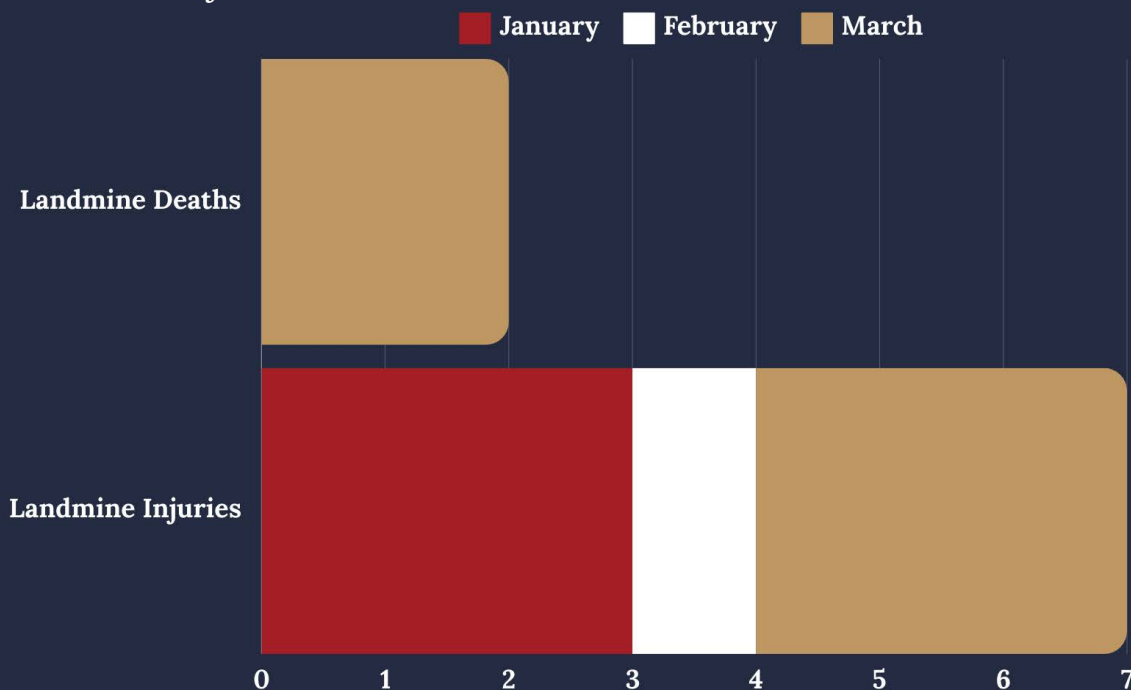


There was just **one shot-on-sight case** in March when a sniper in Loikaw killed a man.

## Landmines

Similar to last year, Karenni communities remained vulnerable to **landmine explosions** planted by the Burmese junta in random civilian areas, intending to make them inhabitable and force resistance troops to lose ground. This quarter, individuals were **killed or sustained injuries** when they accidentally set off blasts while simply going about their day.

In January, **three people were injured** by landmines, while February recorded **one injury** of a 16-year-old teenager in Thei So Leh village. In March, landmines took the lives of two men and three people - including a man from Demoso and a woman and a monk from Hpasawng - sustained injuries.



### **Photo Caption:**

*Combined with mortar shelling, airstrikes, and artillery fire, the junta also drops bombs in civilian areas. Pictured is Loikaw following a blast.*



## Property Damage

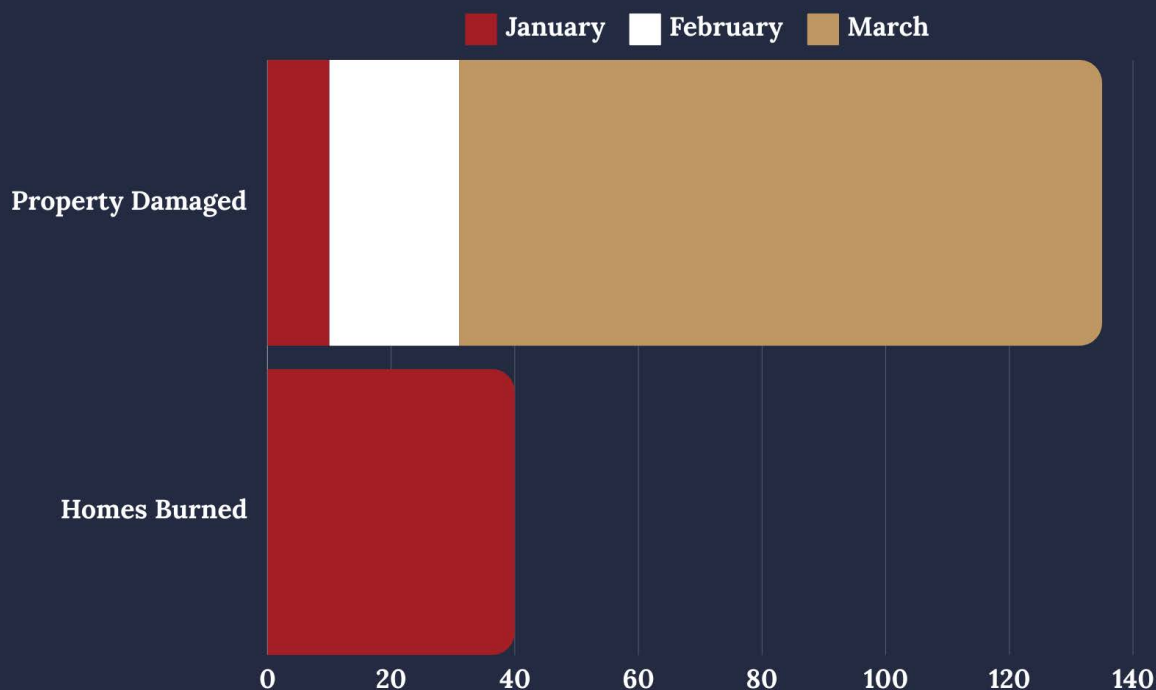
As a result of the devastating airstrikes deployed by the junta this quarter, civilian infrastructure was also dramatically impacted. The Burma Army also regularly scorches homes and entire villages to demoralize the local population. In January, forty homes were burned down, and ten were damaged, all in Shardaw township. The following month, in February, there were 21 damaged properties, including 16 houses, two schools, one rice mill and two churches. In the last month of the quarter, 104 buildings were destroyed by airstrikes, including at least 50 civilian homes in Loikaw. Wildfires from the dry season damaged 129 properties.

Left with nowhere to call home, internal displacement camps and temporary shelters across the camp, leaders, first responders and humanitarian groups struggle to meet the needs of all who have fled to seek refuge. For women and children, this is especially dire as they suffer from malnutrition and waterborne illnesses. There is insufficient food supply to meet even the most basic needs. Every day, people are struggling to survive in Karenni State.



### **Photo Caption:**

*The Burma Army targeted two schools. Daw Si Ei school was hit by a series of bombs, and Loi Nan Pa. Children were among those who lost their lives in the attack.*



### Outlier

While there were no outlier occurrences at the start of the quarter, in February, Burmese junta troops forced eight Karenni from Shar Daw village to be guides for them in the area and then shot and killed them all afterwards. Later in March, five children were playing with a weapon when it detonated, killing two of them and injuring the other three. Another Karenni man was also injured this month, though the causes remain unknown.

### Feature: Interview with DMT\*



On February 5, 2024, Village L in Dee Mawsoe Township was targeted by the Burmese military. At about 9 am, my husband and I heard them drop bombs on a nearby village. My husband and others closed the rice mill, expecting the airstrike to begin. Then, our whole family hid in our dug-out bomb shelter; however, he left with my nephew to look outside.



He even said before leaving that he wanted to see where the planes would drop bombs. When we heard the second plane dropping bombs, I warned them to return to the bomb shelter. They said they would but were caught in the crossfire before reaching the shelter. When the Burmese forces started shooting, my nephew crouched down to avoid the shots. My husband didn't lower himself and he was hit.

After they dropped aerial bombs on a Daw Si Ei, they continued to fire at Loi Nan Pa school and a church near our rice mill. They hit the building with small weapons about three times. This was when my husband died. He had three to four wounds in the right arm and chest. I guess it was my husband's time. When my nephew returned to the bomb shelter, I asked him where his uncle was. I knew something was wrong because he was silent.

*I went out to take a look, and I saw his body lying on the ground near the rice mill. I went to touch him and see him. Then, the planes attacked the school, and I was terrified. I kept wondering if my husband still had some life left in him.*

When the sounds of planes flying overhead stopped, I went with my elder brother and sister and others from the area.

Since my husband's death, I don't have the strength or motivation to work. I'm so exhausted. I told my sons to attend school; however, they said they don't want to because they're worried another airstrike will occur. My kids now cry whenever they hear the sound of a plane.

I want peace and justice so that the Burmese junta cannot hurt the people anymore. My husband is already a victim of war, and I don't want anyone else to suffer more casualties. If I have to keep fleeing from the junta, I won't have anything to support my family. I want to go back home and live my life like normal.



*\*Name has been changed to protect the identity of the individual*

## Recommendations

1. Direct coordinate emergency humanitarian aid provision efforts, including through cross-border channels, for the aid to reach the vulnerable population of more than 200,000 Karenni IDPs resulting from the military violence and airstrikes, and combat COVID-19 by providing resources and working in equal and meaningful partnership and collaboration with ethnic and community-based humanitarian and civil society organizations;
2. Impose further targeted sanctions against the military and its leadership and military businesses, including specifically targeting Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprises (MOGE), military-linked business partners and a network of arms dealers;
3. Impose a coordinated global arms embargo on the Burmese military;
4. Sanction the supply of jet fuel to the Burmese military to end airstrikes and impose a no-fly zone;
5. Recommend the International Criminal Court to accept the declaration lodged by the National Unity The government of Burma, under Article 12(3) of the Court's jurisdiction concerning international crimes committed in Burma territory since 1 July 2002;
6. Formally designated safe zone for internally displaced persons under United Nations agencies management, which the Burmese military is not allowed to have access to.