

As the Conflict in Karenni State Worsens, Innocent Communities Are Bearing the Burden of War

Overall Analysis:

Throughout the first quarter of the year, conflict-affected communities in Karenni State suffered immense hardship and ongoing human rights violations by the military junta. The instability that has overwhelmed people is directly linked to ongoing fighting and attacks that have isolated villagers and undermined their efforts to rebuild their lives in safety and security.

The loss of loved ones has become a common occurrence as the people of Karenni State remain shaken by unprecedented strikes and crimes in the communities, including thefts and various forms of violence. The Karenni Human Rights Group (KnHRG) has observed in our documentation that since the attempted coup in 2021, crimes have increased in and have resulted in worsening socio-economic crises.

Human rights violations are occurring with impunity, creating threats to public safety. Even as the junta sought to advance their sham election, an artillery strike on the first day of

Major Quarterly Developments in Karenni State:

January - March 2026

- **22+ Civilians Killed**
- **38+ Civilians Injured**
- **307+ Homes and Buildings Destroyed by Mortar Shells, Artillery and Airstrikes**
- **27+ Cases of Mortar Shelling**
- **17+ Arbitrary Arrests**
- **16+ Airstrikes**

phase one voting left ***three injured and one dead*** in Eastern Loikaw, as impunity for their crimes continues. Nationwide, the people largely rejected the junta's sham election effort, though some were forced to participate out of fear of reprisals and violence.

Amid the three voting phases, residents ***reported*** hearing bombing and the sounds of artillery in Loikaw Township, which caused fear and panic. Additionally, on January 11, during the junta's second phase of its election process, a ***drone-bomb attack*** in Pruso Township set fire to and destroyed a residential house and a rice barn. The junta held the first phase of its 'election' at the end of December 2025, followed by a second and third phase in January and February 2026.

The people on the ground remained unwavering in their rejection of the junta, as over 11 million voters boycotted the process.

Civil society organizations, including KnHRG, strongly ***condemned*** the sham election in a joint statement endorsed by 88 human rights groups. As ***noted*** in the statement:

“An election held by war criminals is not credible. A fraudulent election will not bring peace or stability to Myanmar; it will only deepen societal divisions and fuel further conflict.”



The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) also ***stated*** that this election was 'fake' and that the predetermined winner was 'a fraud.' Throughout the junta's election phases, human rights violations were widespread. According to documentation by ALTSEAN-Burma, from 20 December 2025 to 30 January 2026, there were ***1,288 armed clashes and attacks against civilians***, killing 281 civilians in 178 (out of 330) townships. The junta launched 308 airstrikes across 89 townships. In addition, 404 people were charged under the junta's Election Protection Law, with 9 receiving lengthy jail sentences of up to 49 years.

Against the backdrop of the election, human rights violations and suffering continue due to a lack of reliable, secure access to social services. Civilians in Karenni State continue to face immense health challenges, as temporary shelters and IDP sites lack access to clean water, leading to the **outbreak** of skin infections. Forced displacement has led to illnesses **spreading** rapidly and made it difficult to stop and treat them, especially with a lack of clean water or basic sanitation services. This has resulted in rashes and itchy sores on the bodies of civilians, including children.

Communication blackouts and strict surveillance surrounding transportation have made it even more challenging to arrange treatment. With malnutrition on the **rise** due to rice shortages, the obstacles faced by those with various ailments are all the more detrimental. The deprivation of health rights is contributing to the spread of sickness and preventable diseases, and contributing to mass concern for the well-being of children and the elderly.



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Airstrikes also remain a common source of concern. An innocent woman who was over the age of 70 was **killed** in an aerial strike that took place in the Mawchi area of Hpasawng at 1 AM on February 5. Three others were injured. Previously, on January 30, the junta conducted airstrikes on two locations in Mawchi. KnHRG has condemned airstrikes in Mawchi, including several that took place last year. In 2025, KnHRG documented that Phekon Township, Demoso Township, and Loikaw Township experienced the highest number of rights violations. Phekon Township experienced the highest number of artillery attacks, and Demoso Township experienced the most airstrikes.

In March, the military junta **bombed** Mawchi, yet again, with a bomb landing near a local kitchen, injuring several people nearby. The bombs fell during a time of heavy rain, with the visibility limited, making it even more challenging for civilians to flee.

Arbitrary arrests and the neglect of political prisoners are also of serious concern. Political prisoners must be protected, as **deteriorating conditions and neglect** led to three deaths in Loikaw detention between 2022 and 2024. According to the Karenni Political Prisoners Association, there are 293 political prisoners, of whom 209 have been released, and 84 remain detained. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has continued its daily documentation of cases facing political prisoners and has echoed advocacy calls for the release of those unlawfully detained.

The destruction of violence and attacks in Karenni State continues to take place as the junta perpetrates crimes with impunity. As reported by KnHRG, at least 36 civilian homes were burned and destroyed in Karenni State and along the Shan–Karenni border in January 2026 due to human rights violations committed by the military junta.

In addition, KnHRG reported that throughout December 2025, a total of 59 civilian homes were damaged or destroyed due to arson attacks, airstrikes and heavy artillery shelling carried out by the junta.



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Drone attacks have caused ongoing fear and anxiety in Karenni State. According to local residents, at 10 AM on January 18, junta forces dropped two drone bombs and fired one artillery shell into a village in Hpruso Township. KnHRG documented that by the end of 2025, the military had caused civilian casualties, injuries, and damage from drone bombing. The junta has been targeting civilian areas and bombing with drones continuously.



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KnHRG **reported** 21 drone bombings in 2025. In those drone bombings, (1) child, (6) men, (2) women, (1) of unidentified gender, a total of (10) people were injured, and 7 children, (10) men, (9) women, (6) of unidentified gender, and a total of 32 people were injured. In addition, 7 houses, (2) religious buildings, (1) public building, (10) motorcycles, (3) fields, and (2) animals were damaged. The junta increased their use of drone bombings against the public after June 2025. The junta has used drones to specifically target civilians.

There have been additional concerns regarding fuel amid the ongoing war in the Middle East. Fuel prices have **tripled** in Karenni State, leading to significant increases in food costs and inflation amid an already disastrous and faltering economy. Those displaced and living in remote areas have faced additional burdens as the cost of basic goods is unaffordable. In response, the Karenni Interim Executive Council (IEC) has begun implementing some measures to address the fuel crisis.

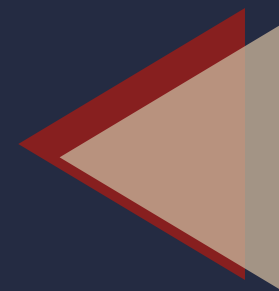


Photo: *Civilians in Karenni State have been struggling amid the ongoing fuel crisis.*
Credit: *The Irrawaddy*

Human Rights Violations in Karenni State: January 2026

The military junta has stepped up its attacks on innocent civilians, with catastrophic impacts on the sustainability of local livelihoods. For farmers, the ongoing threat of drone attacks has prevented cultivation and harvesting in areas where they depend most.

Human Rights Violation	Frequency
Airstrikes	1
Drones	5
Mortar Shelling	8
Landmines	3
Destruction of Properties	3
Arbitrary Arrest	3
Shot on Sight	1



The local governance system on the ground, the Karenni Interim Executive Council (IEC), has attempted to mitigate risks and put in place protection mechanisms, though it stated, “*the interim system cannot guarantee 100 percent protection from dangers.*” Though there have been meaningful efforts to increase accountability, including an investigation by the Karenni State Police (KSP). The KSP handles cases of crimes that the junta has perpetrated, including murder, rape, robbery, theft and property destruction.

The IEC has also raised the alarm about drug-related offences, noting that more than 100 cases were filed with the Karenni State Interim Judiciary Court in 2025, with drug-related and violent

offences accounting for the largest proportion, according to the 2025 annual court report released on February 23. Of the total cases filed during the year, drug-related offences accounted for 33 percent, making them the most common.

Violent crimes accounted for 25 percent, making them the second most prevalent. Other cases included rape (9 percent), theft (5 percent), fraud (4 percent), murder (3 percent), human trafficking (1 percent), and other offences (20 percent), according to the report. To address the psychological and physical challenges facing the public, there must be prioritized donor funding for food assistance, the creation of long-term livelihood opportunities, providing emotional support, and conducting awareness activities about the dangers of drugs and gambling.

The interim judiciary sentenced 253 individuals. Of those convicted, 71 percent received prison terms of less than three months, 10 percent received sentences of less than six months, 18 percent received sentences of less than one year, and 1 percent received prison terms exceeding one year.

While the human rights situation in Karenni State remains difficult, young people in particular continue to show remarkable strength and courage, though the international community must support them as pathways to education and livelihoods have been eroded by the junta's ongoing violence.



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Human Rights Violations in Karenni State: February 2026

Throughout February, human rights violations continued to occur in Karenni State due to the ongoing attacks by the military junta, which is a direct threat to public security and safety. According to KnHRG, there were 24 documented cases in February, including airstrikes and mortar shelling.

There were two airstrikes in Mawchi. The first occurred at the beginning of the month and resulted in the death of an elderly woman. Just a few weeks later, another airstrike destroyed property but did not harm anyone. The relentless attacks in Mawchi, in particular, have led to widespread condemnation, including by KnHRG, and yet there remains an ongoing lack of action and coordination by the international community to halt the violence and destruction in local areas.

Seven people were killed in February (3 men, 3 women, and 1 child), and seventeen were wounded (7 men, 2 women, 3 children, 5 unknown). Additionally, 42 properties were damaged, including 19 houses, 9 fields, 6 animals, 3 public roads and bridges, 1 public building, and four others.

Human Rights Violation	Frequency
Airstrikes	5
Drones	4
Mortar Shelling	10
Landmines	3
Explosion	1
Arbitrary Arrest	1

Human Rights Violations in Karenni State: March 2026

Throughout March, civilians continued to be impacted by ongoing violence caused by the military junta. Civilians were wounded by mortar shelling, artillery attacks and landmines as the ongoing presence of the regime threatens survival, livelihood and education pathways. A camp for internally displaced civilians was **bombed** by the regime in Hrpuso township after it had already been previously attacked with artillery and drones. This has led to further fears and uncertainty as they are repeatedly forced to flee, as new shelters are fired upon. Indiscriminate attacks are also on the rise. Three men were also killed by gunfire when spotted by three new recruits of the junta. Following this, 60 soldiers arrived and shot them.

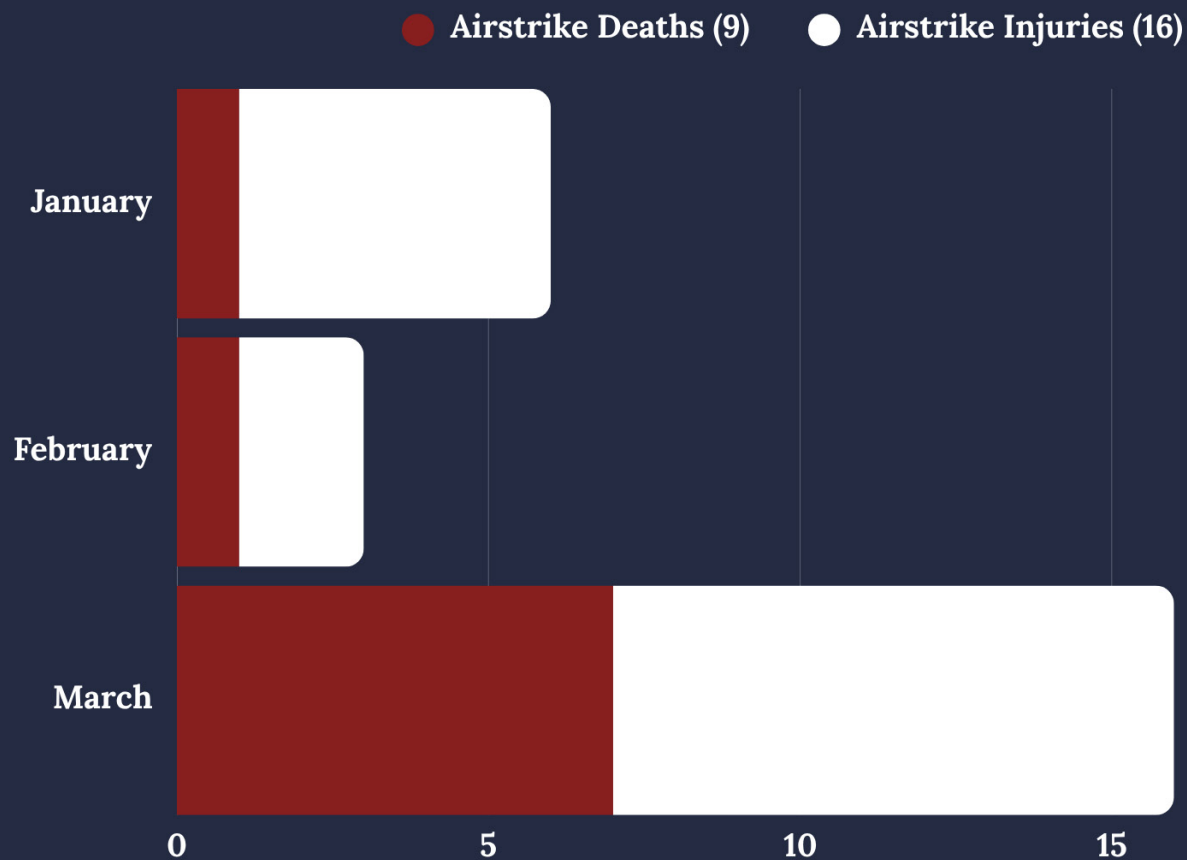
According to the *Kantarawaddy Times*, on March 8, junta forces **fired** three artillery shells at the IDP camp, destroying food supplies stored by the displaced residents, including 15 sacks of paddy rice, 20 sacks of corn, and 50 sacks of peanuts. In addition, the dangers of landmines, particularly in areas where the junta had previously occupied and left, have made villagers vulnerable to explosions. KnHRG documented a case involving a 55-year-old woman who was injured by a landmine while cleaning around her house in Loikaw Township, Htee Se Khar, Lin Hpon Gyi village.

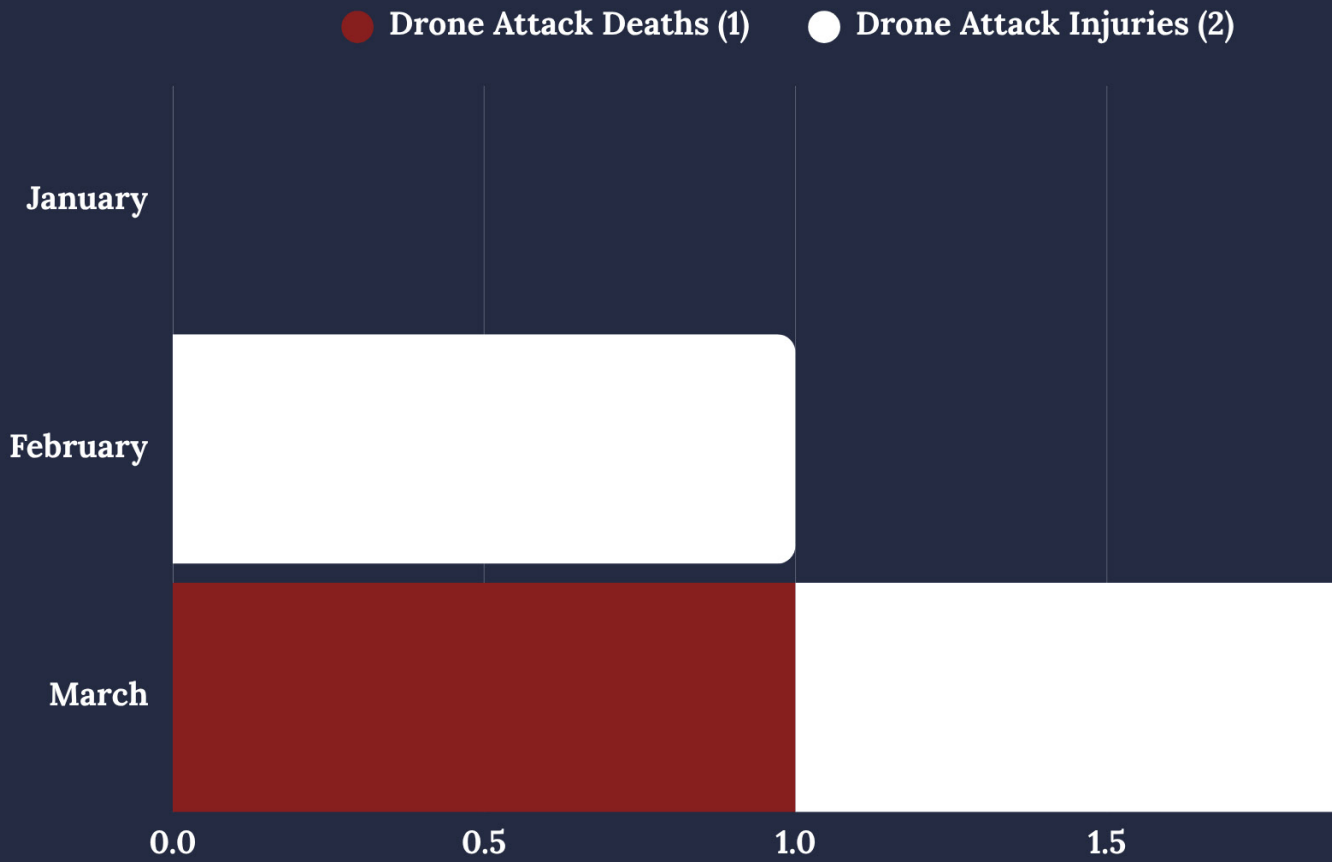
As coup leader Min Aung Hlaing is **appointed** 'president' of the country by a body that is neither legitimate nor recognized by the people, urgent action and attention on Burma are needed now more than ever. Women, children, and the elderly continue to suffer greatly at the hands of power-hungry dictators who deserve to be imprisoned rather than hold positions of authority. It is crucial that global stakeholders stand with the people in Karenni State and all of Burma and work towards justice and accountability. It must be made clear that no one is above the law.

Human Rights Violations

Airstrikes & Drone Attacks

In January 2026, KnHRG documented that one man was killed by an airstrike, in addition to five men being wounded. By February, one man and one woman were injured in an airstrike, and one elderly woman was killed. There were four drone strikes in Demawso, Hpruso, and Hpaswang townships, which injured one man. The five airstrikes were in Hpruso and Hpaswang. In March, airstrikes caused the deaths of three men, three women, and a child. A man was also killed in a drone strike, and a woman was injured. In addition, one man, one woman, and seven others were wounded in airstrikes.





Arbitrary Arrests

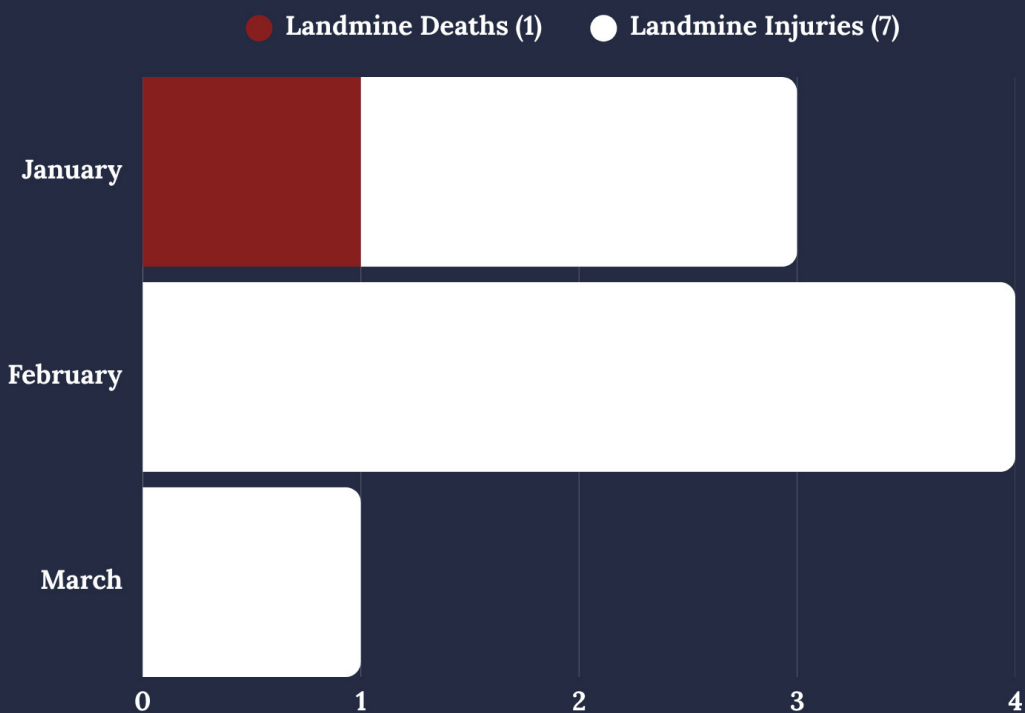
In February, a local man was arrested and tortured by the PNO on 19 February, and he passed away on 21 February. The PNO threatened his family, telling them not to inform any departments.

In March, twelve unknown people were arrested by the junta-backed PNO military. Among them was a village leader. When the PNO destroyed some houses in Hopong Township, Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, Shan State, the villagers' leaders of Nyaungpin and other villages protected their communities and opposed the destruction. In the evening, the PNO broke into their houses and arrested them, according to the Pa-O Youth Organization.

Landmines

One person died from a landmine detonation in January 2026, and one child and a man were injured by a landmine. In February, three men and a child were wounded, and a woman was killed. One of the victims was a man named U Htun, who lived in Demoso, Thal Su Leh, Kone Tar village. On February 8, at around 9 AM, he was injured by a landmine. It hit his right leg, abdomen, and left leg was lost. It happened when he went to pick tamarinds from his farm.

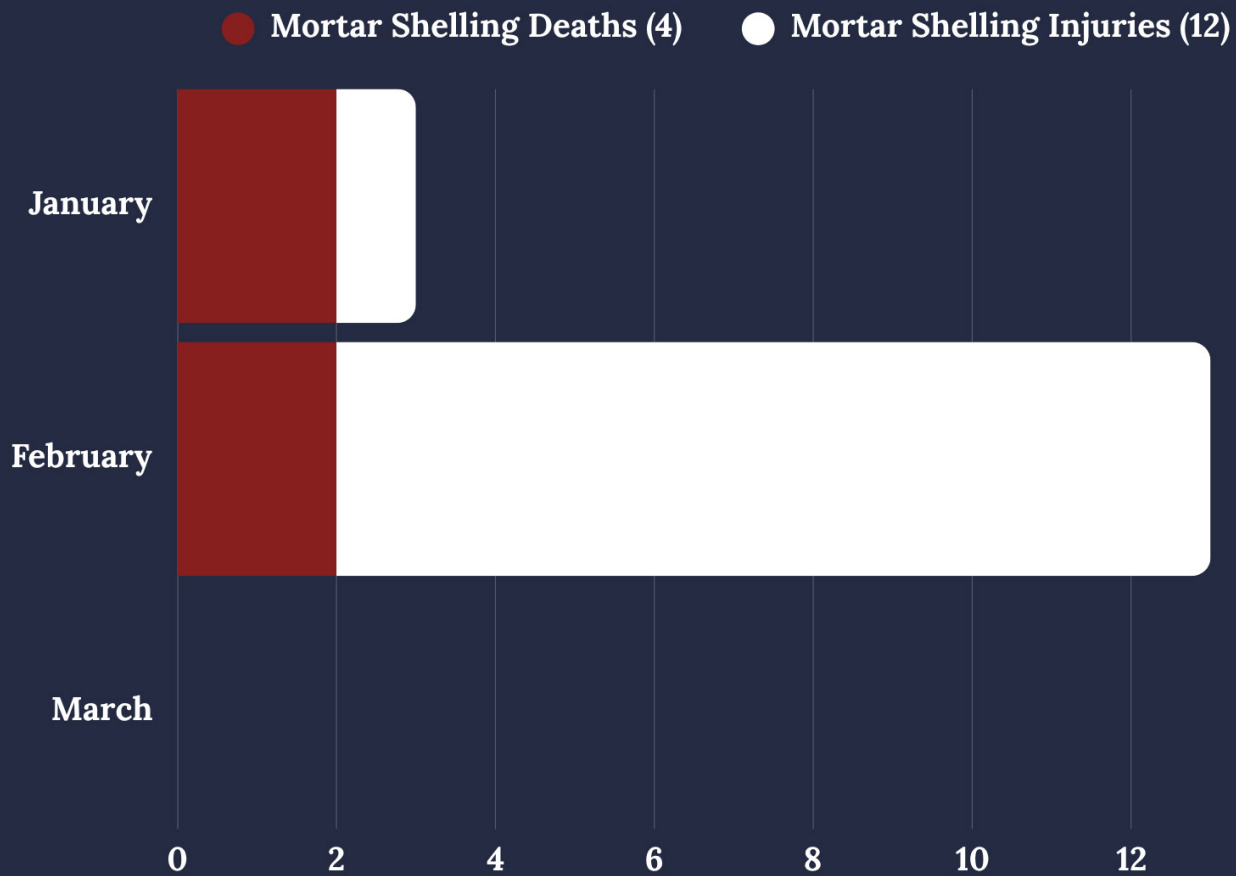
On 24 February 2026, in Loikaw Township, Daw Paw Ka Leh, Htay Ngha Hlar village, three civilians were injured by a landmine while they were returning home to clean. A woman was passing by, and two men were injured. An eleven-year-old girl was also injured by a landmine explosion in Hpaswang Township, Nant Kit village. In March, a 55-year-old woman was injured by a landmine near her home in Loikaw.



The dangers of landmines, particularly in areas where the junta had previously occupied and left, have made villagers vulnerable to explosions

Mortar Shelling

In January 2026, two men died due to firing from mortar shelling, and one child was injured by mortar shelling. In February, mortar shelling injured three men, one woman, two children and five unknown, whereas one man, one woman and a child were killed in townships including Loikaw, Demawso, Phruso, Bawlakel, and Phekhn. There were six instances of mortar shelling in March in Pruso and Loikaw townships.



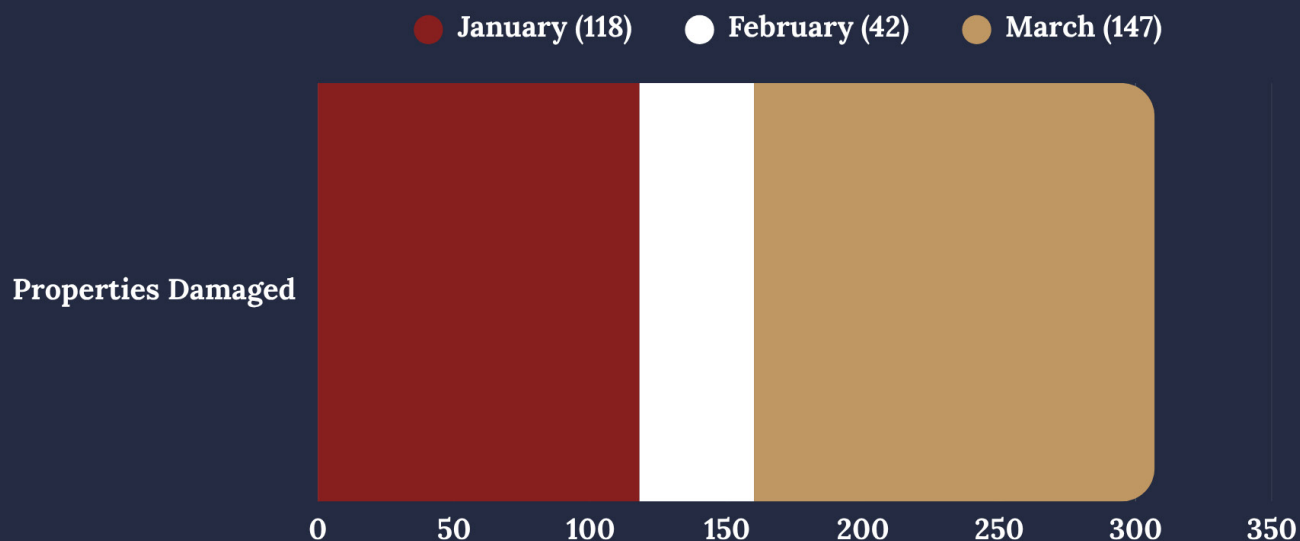
Global intervention on human rights in Burma is long overdue, yet action continues to be delayed and denied. To restore justice for communities suffering from human rights violations, a system must be established to ensure a safe and effective complaints and redress mechanism.

Destruction of Properties

In January, 118 properties were destroyed, including 71 homes, 3 religious buildings, 4 schools, 1 public building, 4 vehicles, 2 rice fields, 2 livestock, and 69 others. The majority of the destruction was due to homes being burned down. On January 29, 2026, at 2:15 PM, in Phekon Township, Sa Long Village, the PNO and the military junta burned civilian houses. Forty-eight houses were burned down. Also, in other villages, 14 houses were burned and destroyed in Hsihseng Township - Naung Kyat Tract, Yae Py and Kayanlay Village.

In February, 42 properties were destroyed, including 19 houses, 1 public building, 3 roads, 9 fields, 6 livestock, and 4 others. Most of the properties destroyed were due to mortar shelling, which damaged 22 infrastructure sites. This was followed by airstrikes that ruined 13 properties. Drones also damaged buildings, as did explosions.

In contrast, during the last month of the reporting period, in March 2026, 147 properties were destroyed, including 45 homes, two religious buildings, three vehicles, eight fields, two livestock, and 87 other infrastructure.



Feature:

The following interview by KnHRG demonstrates the everyday struggles and pain experienced by people in communities across Karenni State.

U Maw Nway Lar (33-year-old), Hpruso Township told KnHRG:

“Every household in the village is facing food and livelihood difficulties. All villagers work daily jobs. There are no other jobs to do. Farming is the main activity in the village. However, the paddy has not grown well. Many elderly, widowed, and single mothers live here. It is very difficult for them to work. It is also hard for households with large families to earn a living. Some children have not eaten properly.

They have to borrow money every year, so when the rice harvest comes, they have to repay the loans. Some families are doing quite well, but most households struggle with their living conditions. Some are very poor, and there is no safe shelter for them. For extra income, we grow vegetables to sell. In the village, many people drink alcohol. They often cook rice to make alcohol, which is why they don't have enough rice.

There is also no clinic in the village. The doctor comes only once a month. Transportation is very difficult; it is too far to go to the clinic. In case of an emergency in the village, it is very hard to reach the clinic. Even when the doctor comes, no one gets sick. They only get sick when the doctor is not there. Since the clinic is too far away, we don't know where to go when we're sick and need medicine. There is no boat in the village and no emergency medicines. If we are sick, we just stay at home.

We only go to the clinic when we have a very high fever. Currently, there are four chronic patients, including disabled people and mentally ill patients. The children in the village are not vaccinated. There are no toilets, very little cleanliness, and no water supply. For the poor and the elderly, we want them to receive food and medical assistance. I also wish for vaccinations to be arranged for children and for child nutrition programs to be provided.

Education access is also challenging. The school buildings were built a long time ago and need renovations. The village is very remote, so no donors are coming. The school also lacks teaching materials, making it hard to teach the students. This is partly due to a lack of knowledge.

Pathways to children's education is also quite difficult. Social relationships are poor, and there is no respect for teachers. Some children are not interested in studying because of their family situations. There are not enough classrooms. It appears that the students' parents are still not supporting their children. Some students try hard. There are also children in the village who cannot attend school. Some students are in higher grades, but there is no nursery school or nursery teacher.

In the village, transportation is poor, so goods do not arrive regularly. Prices are also very high. Some houses do not have proper rice, and people have to travel far to buy it and bring it back. There is a road to the village, but it is only usable during the summer months. During the rainy season, the road becomes very difficult to travel on, and the bridge is damaged, preventing cars from crossing.

The bridge is made of only three bamboo sticks, making travel very challenging. I am very afraid of going to the mountain. The road is still broken. The cost of goods remains very high. However, we can access the internet in the village using Starlink.”

Recommendations

1. Direct and 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, 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.
7. For international courts, including those in Argentina, to issue international arrest warrants for coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, who is responsible for genocide against the Rohingya. Additional international accountability pathways must be established and pursued to ensure justice and reparations for all victims and survivors of the junta's ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.