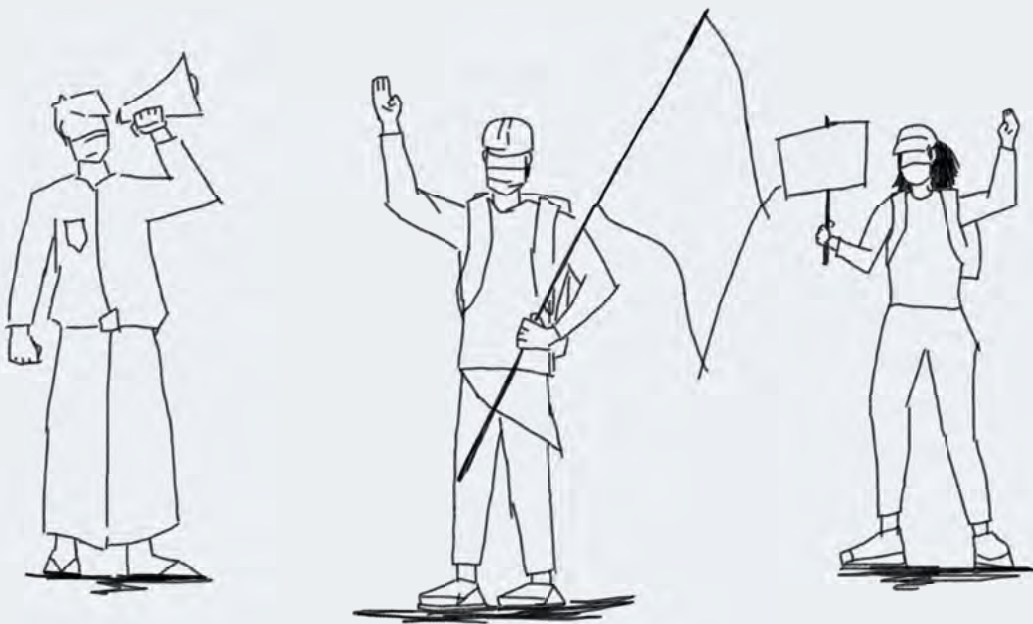


# Real Stories Not Tales

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*A Collection of Youth Stories from Post-Coup Myanmar,  
Part 1: First Reactions (February to May 2021)*



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# Foreword

Dear reader,

You might have noticed that Myanmar (formerly Burma), a country in Southeast Asia, has been receiving much more media coverage than usual in the last few months. Unfortunately, it's not good press: on February 1st, 2021, the Myanmar military staged a coup, detained members of the democratically elected government, and plunged the country into political, economic, and social chaos.

What's behind this coup is a long and complicated story (summarized in *Myanmar in a Nutshell* on pages 4-5), and the coup's aftermath will be remembered by the people of Myanmar and their friends and supporters for years to come. A hugely important part of the country's history is literally unfolding in front of our eyes.

This collection of stories invites you to take a look at the first three months of military tyranny in Myanmar through the eyes of those who have emerged as the coup's fiercest opponents: the country's youth. Nine young people will reveal their realities to you, share their hopes and fears, and ask for your attention and help. This way, we hope you will connect with these faraway experiences of perfect strangers and be compelled to take action.

The nine stories are organized into three sections according to the location in which they took place (see *Map of Myanmar* on page 6). Each section—*Yangon Region* (page 7), *Kachin State* (page 16), and *Rakhine State* (page 24)—begins with a brief description of the area to provide context to the featured stories, and each is accompanied by original illustrations specifically designed for this publication.

At this point you might ask: "But why should I care?". One of these young men has an answer for you: **"We live in a globalized world. A fight for democracy in one place is a fight for democracy everywhere, for all citizens. I want to ask the world to help us, not as hypocrites but honestly and truly as human beings"** (see *Story of Ko Democracy*, p. 23). Speaking from a country with no rule of law and relentless daily human rights abuses, is that too much to ask?

The last section of this publication presents a number of ways in which you can help. These nine young people, as well as countless others, will be extremely grateful for any support.

Thank you!

The 'Real Stories Not Tales' Team

**Note:** For security reasons, young people featured in the nine stories do not use their real names. Similarly, the team responsible for this publication has to remain anonymous, but we hope our commitment and reliability is visible throughout the pages. Real Stories Not Tales will be back in a few months with more stories from Myanmar. If you would like to contact us, please do so by sending an email to: [realstoriesnottales@protonmail.com](mailto:realstoriesnottales@protonmail.com).



# *Myanmar in a Nutshell*

Myanmar (formerly Burma) is a country in Southeast Asia that neighbors Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. The capital city of Myanmar is Nay Pyi Taw. The country is divided into 21 administrative divisions, some of which (Yangon Region, Kachin State, and Rakhine State) are featured in this publication (see *Map of Myanmar*). The country's official currency is Myanmar kyat (MMK), but US dollars are also used in major cities.

Myanmar's population of around 54 million consists of diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. The ethnic Bamar make up around 68% of the total population; the rest is divided among tens of ethnic minorities, such as Mon (see *Story of AT*), Shan (see *Story of Sai*), Kachin (see *Story of Hpare Salum* and *Story of Doris Tsawm*), Rakhine (see *Story of Khin Thandar* and *Story of Ko Pray Zon*), Dawei (see *Story of Ma Ei*), Indian (see *Story of Ma Poe*), and Gorkha (see *Story of Ko Democracy*). Buddhism is Myanmar's dominant religion (practiced by around 88% of the population), with Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism also practiced by some communities. The official language of Myanmar is Burmese, and a number of ethnic languages are also spoken across the country.

Myanmar is a former British colony that gained independence in 1948. Since then, the country has been struggling with civil armed conflict and communal violence, taking place mainly in its ethnic (non-Bamar) borderlands. The Myanmar military (also known as the Tatmadaw) has been fighting the country's ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), with the former claiming to protect the country from dis-integration and the latter demanding equal rights and/or independence for minority groups they represent (see *Story of Hpare Salum* and *Story of Ko Pray Zon*). In addition, violent clashes between different ethnic and religious communities have also been an issue, especially in the last two decades.

The roots of conflict in Myanmar are widely discussed but are most often framed as a historical struggle of its diverse identity groups to agree on the most suitable political arrangement. However, the struggle has never been equal: since independence, the Bamar Buddhist majority has enjoyed a privileged position in politics and society at large, and the Tatmadaw has concentrated military, economic, and political power in its hands over many years. The Myanmar military has also been repeatedly accused of human rights abuses against the country's minority civilian populations, most famously in the so-called 'Rohingya genocide case' at the International Court of Justice in 2019 (see *Story of Ma Poe*). To this day, the generals have enjoyed total impunity for their crimes.

Myanmar has been isolated from the international community for most of its existence, but began opening up in 2011, when the military-backed government initiated a number of reforms and a national peace process as a part of the country's transition to democracy (see *Story of Khin Thandar*). Young people growing up in this transition era ('Generation Z') were the first generation in Myanmar to have a taste of democratic freedoms, including regular internet access, which explains why they have been at the forefront of the resistance against the February 1st coup.

Even before the coup, life in Myanmar was difficult for most. Widespread corruption, long-term mismanagement of natural resources, and illicit trade have made a few rich but kept most in poverty. It is common for youth and even children to financially support their families, especially their younger siblings (see *Story of Sai*). The country's education system has been grossly underfunded, which is why many young people hope to study abroad (see *Story of Sai*, *Story of Hpare Salum*, and *Story of Khin Thandar*). Most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has had devastating socio-economic effects on the most vulnerable groups in the country, such as day laborers and garment workers.

This year's coup is not the first in Myanmar's history—the previous two took place in 1962 and 1988 (see *Story of AT* and *Story of Ma Poe*)—but it is the first time the Tatmadaw justified the takeover with allegations of election fraud. Most analysts agree, however, that the military felt threatened by the sweeping electoral victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and simply aimed to cement its power once again. Aung San Suu Kyi is widely revered in Myanmar, especially among the Bamar Buddhists, but also criticized for not addressing the grievances of the country's minorities (see *Story of Hpare Salum*, *Story of Khin Thandar*, and *Story of Ko Pray Zon*). For the international community, she is a controversial figure; a democracy icon and Nobel Peace Prize winner that did not fulfill expectations.

The February 1st coup has been met with mass resistance—the 'Spring Revolution'—all over the country. An integral part of the revolution has been the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), spearheaded by healthcare workers and civil servants not willing to serve under military leadership. The movement has employed various forms of non-violent resistance: refusal to work and pay government fees and taxes; consumer boycott of military-owned businesses; street protests and labor strikes; banging of pots and pans (to drive out evil spirits, according to traditional beliefs; see *Story of Sai* and *Story of Ma Poe*); and social media campaigns. On top of that, a government in exile called the National Unity Government (NUG) has been formed by representatives of the NLD, ethnic groups, and other pro-democracy actors. Its aim is to overthrow the military regime and ultimately build a federal democratic union of Myanmar.

The resistance movement has been met with brutal and systematic crackdowns by the Tatmadaw. As of June 4th, 845 people have been killed, 5,708 arrested, and 4,565 remain in detention. Tens of thousands have been internally displaced, which is unfortunately not a new trend in Myanmar (see *Story of Hpare Salum* and *Story of Ko Pray Zon*). Internet access has been severely restricted; the education, health, and bank sectors have been paralyzed; and many businesses have stopped operating (see *Story of Ko Pray Zon* and *Story of Ko Democracy*). As the military's oppression continues, citizens are gradually trading non-violent strategies for armed resistance, often with support of the battle-hardened ethnic armed organizations (see *Story of Hpare Salum* and *Story of Ko Democracy*).



# Map of Myanmar



# Yangon Region

Yangon is the capital city of Myanmar's most developed region (Yangon Region). Yangon itself is the country's economic hub and main international gateway, where much of its trade, industry, real estate, media, entertainment, and tourism is concentrated. Yangon was the capital of Myanmar from 1948 to 2005, when it was replaced by the newly built city of Nay Pyi Taw.

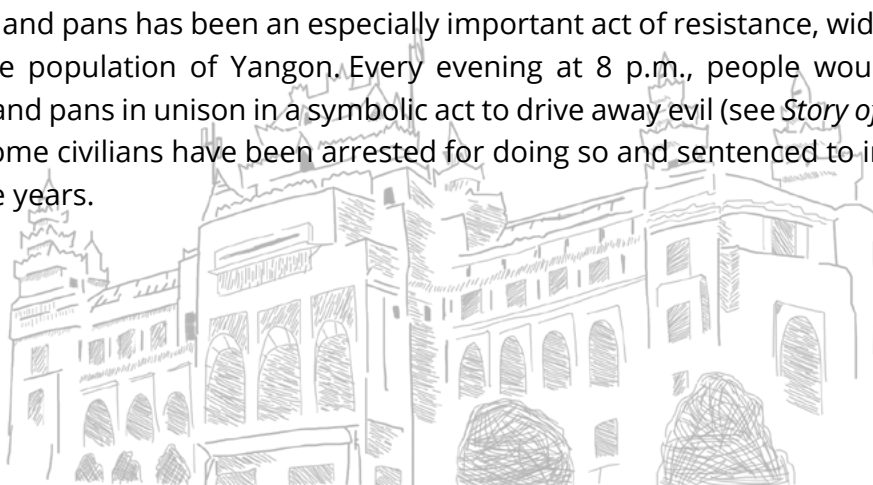
With a population of over 5 million, Yangon is by far Myanmar's most populous, and it is also the most ethnically and religiously diverse: while Bamar make up the majority of the population, there is a strong representation of the Indian- and Sino-Burmese minority groups, and due to the high rate of labor and student migration into Yangon, there is also a great mix of other minorities.

Yangon is where many young people seek better education and employment opportunities (see *Story of Sai*). After improving their skills and gaining more experience, some youth go back to their home communities and work towards local development (see *Story of AT*), while others apply for scholarships to continue their university studies abroad (see *Story of Sai*).

Yangon is divided into 33 townships (administrative divisions). Some of these townships are mentioned in the four youth stories presented in this section, such as Sanchaung Township (see *Story of AT* and *Story of Sai*), Hlaing Township (see *Story of Ma Ei*), and Hledan Township (see *Story of Ma Ei* and *Story of Ma Poe*). Hledan Center, a popular shopping center in Hledan Township, was a key location at the beginning of the protest movement in Yangon (see *Story of Ma Ei*), since it is strategically located at the intersection of student townships (Sanchaung, Hlaing, and Insein) and is close to Yangon University.

As Myanmar's biggest city, significant resistance against the military takeover is taking place in Yangon. Due to the increasingly brutal crackdowns, Yangon's youth have employed different forms of resistance over time. Some young people have taken up 'front-liners' positions in street battles with military and police forces (see *Story of Sai* and *Story of Ma Ei*), others have relied on so-called 'flash-mob rallies' that allow protesters to suddenly assemble at a specific location, stage a brief protest, and then quickly disperse in order to avoid casualties (see *Story of Ma Poe*).

Banging pots and pans has been an especially important act of resistance, widely employed by the diverse population of Yangon. Every evening at 8 p.m., people would bang their kitchen pots and pans in unison in a symbolic act to drive away evil (see *Story of Sai* and *Story of Ma Poe*). Some civilians have been arrested for doing so and sentenced to imprisonment of up to three years.





# Story of AT



**AT is a Mon activist. She was interviewed on March 27th.**



"I never expected the military coup to happen—again. That day, a friend of mine was staying over at my rented apartment in Yangon's Sanchaung Township. At around 4.30 a.m., both of us received phone calls saying that Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Myint had been arrested. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Really? Are you sure?! After a while, the breaking news was everywhere. I thought I was dreaming. I even considered that it might just be a joke or propaganda by the military, but calls with family and friends soon ruled that out.

After the news had been confirmed, I began to reflect on my life up until that point. Born in 1988, when the previous military coup took place, I have been denied opportunities for better education and a higher income my whole life. I thought, I won't let this happen again to my younger peers, the so-called Generation Z. I was afraid, I was shocked, and I felt lost, but at the same time, I was asking myself: What should we, as young women, do first?

***"I was afraid, I was shocked, and I felt lost, but at the same time, I was asking myself: What should we, as young women, do first?"***

Before the coup, I had been planning to work in Yangon for another two years, and then move back to my home state to start an organization focusing on the environment, land issues, and research. I had already imagined setting up a library and connecting with similar organizations both in Myanmar and abroad. However, all my plans were changed and all my dreams were lost on February 1st. I knew I had to re-prioritize, and very quickly my number one priority was to be a part of the resistance movement against the military coup. Luckily, my employer has been very understanding, and continues to support me financially even though I don't work regular hours anymore. My life plans are ruined, but we must fight, and we must win.

I spent the first few weeks of February in Yangon, but after that, I had to move back to my state for security reasons. The situation in big cities here is the same though: shootings, killings, and arrests on one hand, and strikes, protests, and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) on the other. In villages, people are scared; the newly imposed 8 p.m.–4 a.m. curfew has made their lives difficult. Many of them work on rubber plantations and would normally leave their house in the very early hours of the morning. Soldiers also arrest villagers at random, only to ask their families for a ransom (50,000 Myanmar kyats, which is about 30 US dollars)—the same strategy was used during previous military takeovers. My parents still remember the pain and carry the trauma of those times; they tell me that participating in the movement is dangerous and that we, the people, will never win.

I have mostly been offering technical support to the movement and typically attend meetings all day, so I generally keep a low profile out in the streets. When I feel angry or upset, I stop checking the news for a while; I have even deactivated my Facebook account temporarily. What also helps me feel better is playing with children and cute animals, like puppies. Actually, it's impossible for me to read or concentrate on anything at the moment; even my dreams at night are about the military coup. It has really disrupted my life. At the same time, I am very grateful that I've gotten to experience so many young people from the different nationalities of Myanmar working together. In one powerful moment, we were standing together with our different national flags, and I thought to myself: We are united. This is a federal synergy, all the different colors of our nationalities' flags, fluttering for a federal democratic union. And I'm holding my flag among them.

Many people talk about democracy in Myanmar, but what I want to tell them is to look beyond democracy. Looking at the whole picture, we are fighting for federal democracy. Please raise your voice for us: not only because of the violence committed by the military since February 1st, but for the last 70 years."

***“Please raise your voice for us: not only because of the violence committed by the military since February 1st, but for the last 70 years.”***



# Story of Ma Ei



**Ma Ei is a Dawei female activist. She was interviewed on March 29<sup>th</sup>.**

“When I woke up on the morning of February 1st, I wondered why the internet wasn’t working. I didn’t understand what was going on. Then a neighbor knocked on my door and told me that Myanmar was under a military dictatorship now. I couldn’t believe it: was it a bad joke, was it fake news? I tried to contact my family and friends, but there was no phone signal. It was only after a few hours, and once I was able to talk to my mother, that I understood it was no joke.

I live in a hostel with other youth in Hlaing Township in Yangon. I have been working for a couple of months as a Monitoring and Evaluation Intern with an organization focusing on gender equality. I felt so confident and excited about the future. But the news of the coup completely changed my perspective on the opportunities that lay ahead. The military takeover was now a terrible reality we had been thrown into. I felt numb; I couldn’t speak. What about my dreams? What about my future?

Once the internet was reconnected, I was finally able to start exchanging messages with friends, making plans, and organizing resistance, which energized me. First, we heard that things might get back to normal after three days, so we stayed home. But nothing happened. I knew that this wasn’t a solution—if they had stolen our future, we needed to fight back and stand up for our rights! Shortly after, I joined the first protest with a group of eight friends. It took place near the Hledan Center, a big shopping mall in Hledan Township. The crowd was incredible!

I continued protesting with the same group of friends. Some are Kachin, others Karen, and I am Dawei. During the first weeks we met many people out in the streets and made many new friends. The unity of the crowd was so impressive; people respected each other and many were giving out donations. We organized ourselves online, day after day. Throughout March, however, we have been going out into the streets less and less. The situation has become very dangerous in Yangon. It is basically a battleground, but only one side has guns. But in Hlaing Township, Generation Z is still out in the streets, taking huge risks. Boys are worried about girls being at the frontline—they want to protect us so have asked us to stay further back.

***“The situation has become very dangerous in Yangon. It is basically a battleground, where only one side has guns.”***

***“If I stay inside, I start feeling depressed; this is my daily work, this has become my duty.*”**

Most of our group members have gone back to their states and regions; there are only two of us left. My mother is calling me every day and asking me to come back home and stay with them. She is very worried. But if I go back, I won't be able to join the movement. My hometown is small, and everybody knows everybody. The security forces would know what I am doing, and I would end up in jail quickly. I would rather stay here and contribute to the movement as much as I can.

Our beliefs are stronger than our fears. Even though many people have lost their lives, I believe we will win. We will get our democracy. Our hope for a better future is so strong! My generation, the Generation Z, is showing so much determination. Every morning we assess the situation; if we have a chance, we go outside, because we must fight. If I stay inside, I start feeling depressed; this is my daily work, this has become my duty.”



# Story of Sai



**Sai is a young man from Northern Shan State who migrated to Yangon for better work and education opportunities. He was interviewed on April 4th.**



“I had had a few drinks that evening, so I was quite thirsty throughout the night before February 1st. When I got up to drink some water at around 4 a.m., I saw a message about the coup in a group chat I have with my classmates. After I read the message, I started shouting to wake up my two roommates and a friend that was staying with us at the time. We checked the Facebook pages of various media outlets to confirm if the news was true—and it was. We were all shocked and just kept saying: Sh\*t, this is really happening. It felt as if somebody foreign, from the outside, took our independence from us.

We didn’t really know what to do, but at around 7 or 8 a.m., we went to a tea shop nearby to see what was happening. It was pretty quiet. The day passed by and the night came, but we couldn’t sleep and just wondered: What should we do? How should we respond? What kind of future awaits us now? For years I had been working hard to pay for my three younger sisters’ education. My family back in Shan State was finally doing okay financially because of that. But how could we do that now, with this coup?! I felt like I had lost everything, with so many others like me in Myanmar that had been trying to escape poverty.

***“I felt like I had lost everything, together with so many others in Myanmar that had been trying to escape poverty.”***

Before February 1st, I was working in Yangon while preparing for university in the U.S., for which I had recently received a scholarship. I was getting ready for my English proficiency test and discussing visas and other practical issues with my classmates. After the coup, all these conversations stopped. I didn’t want to talk about these things anymore—it just felt wrong. Instead, I wanted to focus on what to do in the present, how to react to the current situation in the country. And so, my first priority became participating in the protests in my township, Sanchaung, while trying to catch up on my work at night.

Most days we gather at around 9 or 10 a.m. on one of the small side streets and then go to the main road together. The police are usually already there. I tend to stand close to the frontline, so I can see exactly what is happening. The frontline fighters are very young, brave, and smart. They know how to lead and how to instruct others. I feel so proud and hopeful seeing them—it makes me think there is a bright future ahead of us. Apart from protests, banging pots and pans every night is very important as well. It boosts people’s courage and motivates them. It is a daily reminder of what we still have to do. And it also allows you to release all the anger and guilt you feel about not being able to protect our young people from dying every day.

***“The frontline fighters are very young, brave, and smart. They know how to lead and how to instruct others. I feel so proud and hopeful seeing them—it makes me think there is a bright future ahead of us.”***

Both of my roommates have already left Yangon, but if I go home to my family, I don't think I would be able to do anything in my village, both in terms of work and my participation in the protest movement. There is no internet in my village anymore, and soldiers are now camping in the school compound. I am also the first person in my village to graduate, so I think I would attract too much attention.

What helps me get through these difficult times is the memory of the very first protests in February: remembering the female factory workers who started these protests, or all the people out in the streets who supported us, since none of them wanted to live under the military regime. I feel hopeful about the future—I believe everything will get better. People now talk openly about the suffering that the various vulnerable groups in the country have been enduring, so I think the chances of reconciliation are quite high. I also got a lot of energy from listening to a band that was playing at the protests at some point. It was a group of young, very skilled musicians that gathered next to Pandomar Park under a simple vinyl poster proclaiming ‘Music for Civil Disobedience Movement’ and entertained everybody with revolutionary songs. They stopped playing after the first crackdown though.

***“I feel hopeful about the future, I believe everything will get better. People now talk openly about the suffering that the various vulnerable groups in the country have been enduring, so I think the possibilities for reconciliation are quite high.”***

Unfortunately, Myanmar doesn't really have great neighbors, at least when it comes to their respective governments. So, I would like to appeal to ordinary people living in these countries instead, to put pressure on their governments to not support the military regime in any way. I just want everybody in Myanmar to be able to build a good future for themselves.”



# Story of Ma Poe



**Ma Poe works in the field of peace building in Yangon.  
She was interviewed on April 5<sup>th</sup>.**

“On that day, I had planned to go to the office early. I had an important report to finish, and I like working in the early hours of the day, when the city is still quiet, slowly waking up. I was about to leave the house—it was around 6:30 a.m.—when I received a message in our team’s group chat: ‘Do not go to the office today’. There had been a military coup, the internet had been shut down, and our leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi together with other members of the government had been arrested.

I was shocked. I have been working in the peace and conflict field for years, and I could not believe this was happening in 2021. But my parents remained calm; they had seen this happen before, and so it seemed like we could get used to living under a military regime again. This shocked me even more: Why were they so cool about it?! I wanted to connect with friends, but the network was still down. I felt so lonely. The street was quiet; not even the usual fruit and bean sellers were around. Is this it? It felt as if we were going to let it happen, just like that. Finally, at around 12 p.m., when the internet was reconnected, I saw the resistance being organized by young people online. Only after that was I able to eat my breakfast and breathe normally.

I live in a working-class township of Yangon. People are pretty poor; some are daily workers. I don’t know my neighbors well, as I work downtown and typically only spend evenings and early mornings at home. We are Indians, but my parents and grandparents were born in Myanmar, so we all have Myanmar citizenship. However, we still don’t feel like we belong here, and we have experienced discrimination for years. I guess that’s why my parents remained so calm on that day; maybe they thought it wasn’t their struggle. If they wanted to, they could fly back to India. It reminded me of the Rohingya crisis, when we felt like we couldn’t talk about our own feelings and sorrows, because we feared a similar kind of injustice could happen to us too.

Even before the coup, life wasn’t that fun, since we had already been living under Covid-19 restrictions since April 2020. I mostly stayed in and worked at home. I thought we were finally close to going back to ‘normal’, but I couldn’t have been more wrong. Right now, I can’t even focus on my studies or work; I can only focus when I am out, fighting for our rights. I am putting all my energy into the Spring Revolution.

***“Right now, I can’t even focus on my studies or work; I can only focus when I am outside, fighting for our rights. I am putting all my energy into the Spring Revolution.”***

In February, there were no protest leaders and everybody would simply go out into the streets to join massive crowds in towns and cities all over Myanmar. The first time I joined such a crowd was in Hledan Township. I was amazed by how many people were there! We were all shouting with our hearts, raising the three fingers' salute, and it motivated me so much. But since the end of February, after brutal crackdowns by the military, there have been much fewer people participating. It is mainly the famous Generation Z that continues to be active.

We are now organizing smaller gatherings, and often doing walking protests, since this makes it easier for us to disperse when the security forces arrive. We also change the location every day to make it difficult for them to track our moves. But we also know that we are not safe anywhere, because there are so many informers around. When we pass by tea shops or street stalls selling noodles, the staff doesn't encourage us anymore. They are scared of getting hurt. The brutality of the oppressor has brought fear into our hearts.

In my township, people go to the market in the morning as usual. Children are playing in the streets; motorcycles, cars, and bicycles are circulating somewhat normally. People here are not that afraid because they haven't protested for days. You don't even notice there has been a coup. However, every evening, a strange silence settles over the neighborhood, and at 8 p.m., people turn off their lights. I am the only one banging pots and pans now—everybody else worries that this will bring repression to our neighborhood. My family doesn't bang pots and pans anymore either. Two days ago, my dad hid them from me, but I managed to find new ones.

***“Every evening, a strange silence settles over the neighborhood, and at 8 p.m., people turn off their lights. I am the only one banging pots and pans now—everybody else worries that this will bring repression to our neighborhood. My family doesn't bang pots and pans anymore either.”***

Sometimes I hear the sound of another discrete pot-banging somewhere close by. I know it is dangerous. They can come and arrest us—not just me, but my whole family. Of course, I'm scared, but I am more scared of doing nothing. If we are afraid, how must the people in conflict areas feel? They have been violently oppressed for years, so I feel like I can't be selfish. Despite having been discriminated against by the very same society, I feel like I need to move on from the past and get involved today, whichever nationality I am. Taking action and standing up is the only way forward—for my country's future and for those who have suffered over 70 years of oppression and civil war.



***“Despite having been discriminated against by the very same society, I feel like I need to move on from the past and get involved today, whichever nationality I am. Taking action and standing up is the only way forward.”***

When I was attending my post-graduate studies in Yangon, there were only 20 students in my class, but it was still difficult for us to agree on issues about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the country's leadership, the many ethnicities, and so on. I learnt a lot from this experience. Now I have so much more sympathy for my classmates from conflict areas. When I was studying with them, I thought we were the same, but only now can I really imagine the mental and physical brutality they have been through.

I can't stop thinking about what my future will be like if the coup succeeds. If I have to run away from Yangon, will I be able to come back one day? I know that I might be shot or arrested, but what about people who are losing their lives? Before, when Yangon was peaceful, I went on holidays, and watched movies with my friends. Now I see that that was very selfish, because some people in our country were already suffering at that time. We didn't do much for them then, and that is why it is so important for me to be involved now.

Along with many others, I used to think that the solution to the crisis would come from the international community, through 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) or other means. We repeatedly asked them for help and intervention. Now I see that we have to fight for ourselves, for our freedom. Outside help is welcome, but even if it doesn't come, we will move on, and we will not give up.”





# *Kachin State*

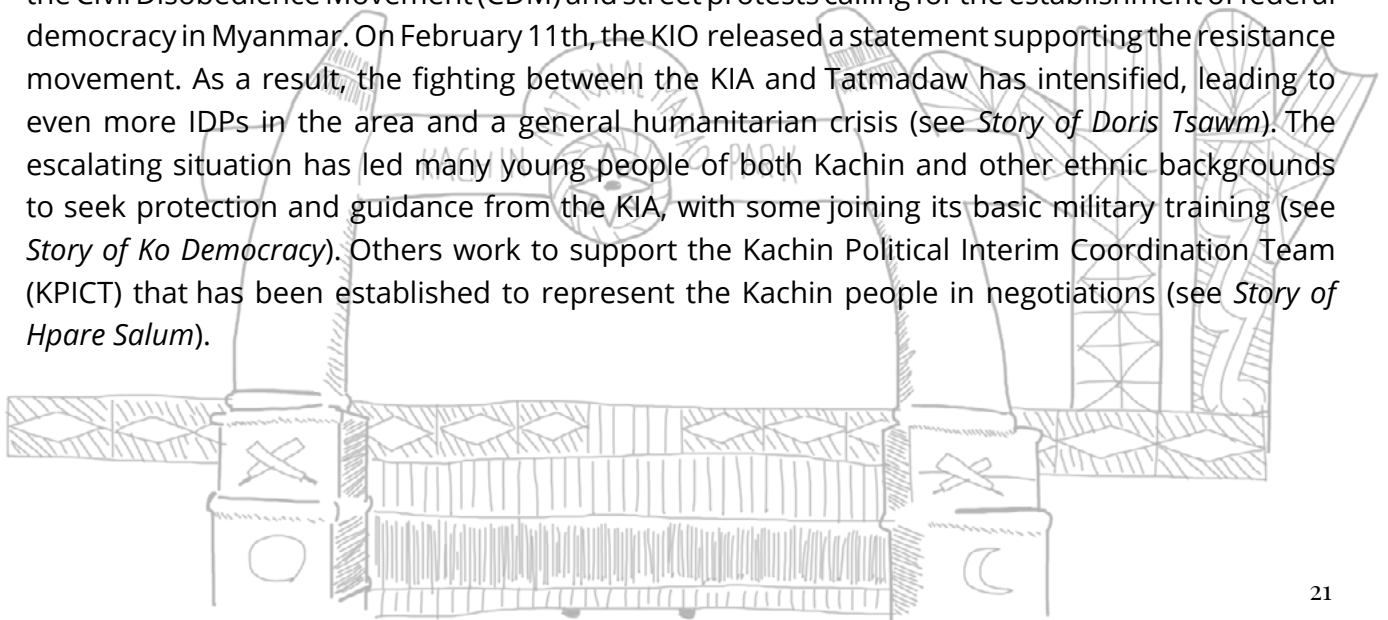
Kachin State is located in the northeast of Myanmar, sharing its borders with both China and India (see *Map of Myanmar*). The capital city of Kachin State is Myitkyina, where around 200,000 people live. The state is named after the majority ethnic group living in the region, the Kachin, which comprises several sub-groups (or tribes): Jinghpaw, Lisu, Rawang, Laovo, Lachid, and Zaiwa. Some Shan, Bamar, and Gorkha (or Nepali; see *Story of Ko Democracy*) people also live there. The main religions are Buddhism and Christianity (especially among the Kachin; see *Story of Doris Tsawm*), but animism, Hinduism, and Islam are also practiced.

The main ethnic armed organization (EAO) operating in Kachin State is the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which were established in 1961. The KIO is one of the largest and most influential EAOs in Myanmar, fighting for equal rights, self-determination, and autonomous territory of the Kachin people. The KIO's headquarters are located in a town called Laiza, which has evolved into an important political and cultural center over the last few decades (see *Story of Hpare Salum*).

As well as the political aspirations of the Kachin people, the conflict between the KIA and Tatmadaw is strongly driven by competition over the state's natural resources—which include jade, gold, silver, iron, amber, crystal, coal—and its strategic position bordering China. The KIA and Tatmadaw signed a ceasefire in 1994, but it collapsed in 2011 (see *Story of Hpare Salum*). As a result of subsequent fighting, there were around 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the state even before the 2021 coup (see *Story of Hpare Salum*).

Like in other EAO-controlled areas in Myanmar, the KIO has established its own education, healthcare, and public utility services in the region. Education is a major issue because high school diplomas issued by KIO-administered schools have not been recognized by the Myanmar government education system since the collapse of the ceasefire in 2011. This makes further studies for youth from the area almost impossible, which has been a source of a lot of frustration among the young people and has also motivated them to fight for change.

There has been strong resistance against the February 1st coup in Kachin State, both in the form of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and street protests calling for the establishment of federal democracy in Myanmar. On February 11th, the KIO released a statement supporting the resistance movement. As a result, the fighting between the KIA and Tatmadaw has intensified, leading to even more IDPs in the area and a general humanitarian crisis (see *Story of Doris Tsawm*). The escalating situation has led many young people of both Kachin and other ethnic backgrounds to seek protection and guidance from the KIA, with some joining its basic military training (see *Story of Ko Democracy*). Others work to support the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT) that has been established to represent the Kachin people in negotiations (see *Story of Hpare Salum*).



# Story of Hpare Salum



**Hpare Salum recently finished an internship after having graduated in Yangon. He was interviewed on April 17th.**

“When the coup happened, I was staying with my school seniors in Hlaing Township, Yangon. One of them was going to attend his first day at work and while he was getting ready, the leader of his organization called him and informed him about the coup. That’s how we found out that the military had seized power and cut all networks. I had already experienced something similar in the past, so I knew this was happening for real. I felt hopeless; I felt destroyed. I felt as if my future had been stolen from me.

Just before the coup, I had gotten a job in Yangon, and was planning to gain more work experience in preparation for my studies abroad. But I knew this wouldn’t be possible under a military regime, so I decided to go back to Kachin State. Most of my school comrades chose to stay and participate in the protest movement in Yangon, but honestly, I had no intention of doing that—I was certain that the military would do anything to stop the protests. I know this military junta and I know that they are capable of committing the worst atrocities. In 2011, they shot a friend of mine and a relative, and I didn’t want to live through anything like that again.

***“I had already experienced something similar in the past, so I knew this was happening for real. I felt hopeless; I felt destroyed. I felt as if my future had been stolen from me.”***

We, the Kachin people, have been bullied since we were born, never receiving any support from the central government and even less so from the military. When the ceasefire between the KIA and the Myanmar military collapsed, I was in Grade 9. On June 22nd, 2011, the military came to our village. It was a devastating experience: we had to flee and stay in the jungle on the Chinese border for days. In the end, this place became a camp for IDPs, including me and my family.

The camp leaders managed to build a school with the very few resources available, which is how I was able to carry on with my education. Most young people and adults were asked to join the KIA, and so my father became a soldier. I lived with my mother, my younger brother, and two sisters in the camp. My three other siblings stayed in Myitkyina. In 2016, we had to flee again, because the military engaged in mortar shelling of an area nearby. Having fled civil war twice in my life, I don’t like the military junta at all—to put it mildly. I think non-violence works in some parts of the world, but it doesn’t work in Myanmar.

Now I'm staying in a new city-state on the Chinese border called Laiza, where the headquarters of the KIO are. The city is in a valley, and you only need to cross a river to get into the Chinese territory. Everything you need can be found in Laiza: hotels, restaurants, shops, schools (providing free education), and hospitals (providing free health care). You can use both Myanmar kyats and Chinese yuan here. It's a safe place. There is no CDM in this area, but many CDM people from the rest of the country are coming to find refuge here or to join basic military training. I heard most of the training is given in Burmese. There are also many young Kachin people coming to Laiza, some to serve the KPICT.

My personal hope for the future is still to study abroad, but it has been a real struggle, and I am tired of trying. Right now, I need to help my people. If I need to engage in combat, I will; I can't avoid it. Many Kachins have become actively involved in the KIO or its army. Having an independent state is the dream of Kachin people and I wish to be a part of the generation that will see this dream come true. We need to stand for what we believe in; we have that responsibility. I know there will be many challenges on this journey to freedom, but we will fight until we achieve independence. I believe that the KIO will be one of the leaders of real political change in Myanmar.

***“My personal hope for the future is still to study abroad, but it has been a real struggle, and I am tired of trying. Right now, I need to help my people.”***

Speaking to the international community, I would like to ask them to recognize Myanmar's EAOs and the systems of governance they have established in their respective states and regions, including the education systems. I wish the world would cooperate with the EAOs, since Myanmar's ethnic people see them as their legitimate governments. In reality, these EAOs represent the voice of ethnic people.”

***“I wish the world would cooperate with the EAOs, since Myanmar's ethnic people see them as their legitimate governments. In reality, these EAOs represent the voice of ethnic people.”***



# Story of Doris Tsawn

**Doris Tsawm is a researcher in the field of human rights, peace, and economic development. She was interviewed on May 5th.**

“Even though there had been some speculation in the media about a coup happening, I didn’t really believe it. The night before both power and internet cut out in the area where I was staying, but it still didn’t occur to me that a military takeover was about to take place. So, I was really shocked when I heard the news the following morning! I have never experienced a coup myself, but given the Myanmar military’s record of human rights violations, I immediately realized that the situation was about to get worse, and I became very sad.

At the time of the coup, I was living in Myitkyina and planning to travel to Yangon to meet my work supervisor. But I knew that wouldn’t be possible anymore, so I moved to my grandmother’s house to stay with my family. In the weeks following the coup, none of us felt like talking much; we couldn’t even eat or sleep properly. We were all scared. I wasn’t able to concentrate on my work; actually, I wasn’t able to do anything. I would spend all day every day checking for updates on Facebook.

***“In the weeks following the coup, none of us felt like talking much; we couldn’t even eat or sleep properly. We were all scared.”***

Before the coup, when we were only fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, I felt like it was okay, since it was a global problem. But now, I am so disappointed and angry. We have to deal with a ‘double crisis’ in Myanmar—it’s not fair. The country’s economy is in ruins, and so many young people’s education has been postponed indefinitely. Everything is so uncertain now. I worry about the future of my younger cousins, nieces, and nephews. I have lost hope of achieving my personal goals too, but luckily, I can still continue working remotely for my organization in Yangon.



***“Before the coup, when we were only fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, I felt like it was ok, since all the other countries had to do the same. But now, I am so disappointed and angry, because this is not fair: we have to deal with a ‘double crisis’ in Myanmar.”***

In Myitkyina, there have been protests and the CDM since the beginning and they are still going, but most older people don't participate anymore, only the youth are left. That's why young people are being targeted. Just the other day, 10 were arrested while organizing themselves at a market. By now, there are over 100 young people in jail here, including journalists and humanitarian workers. In addition, the KIA and the military are still fighting, so many vulnerable groups in the region need help: women, government teachers participating in the CDM, IDPs, etc.

I have been helping to channel money coming from donors abroad to local women's organizations. Otherwise, I don't go out much, only when I really have to. The gate that I need to pass to get downtown or to the market has very thorough security checks now and the military basically arrest anybody they want. I always hide sensitive photos on my phone and make sure they will not find anything suspicious.

During these difficult times, I don't get any specific psychological support, but just the fact that I am with my family and we are facing the situation together helps a lot. It would have been much more challenging for me to do this alone. For a long time, I have been away from home, living and working in many different places in Myanmar and abroad, never having the opportunity to spend months like this with them, so I'm enjoying it. As a Christian, praying and night worships also help me, as well as talking to my friends.

We really need humanitarian aid in Myanmar. Even ordinary people are struggling now. Collecting money inside the country is only a short-term solution, but definitely not sufficient in the long term. I also don't think this is the right time to discuss development, but instead, to advocate for humanitarian aid to support the vulnerable people across the country.”





# Story of Ko Democracy



**Ko Democracy is a young Gorkha man working for a social enterprise in Kachin State. He was interviewed on May 6th.**

“When I woke up on the morning of February 1st, I noticed I had no phone signal. Then my dad came back from the bazaar and said the Myanmar military was everywhere, especially around the NLD party headquarters and residences of NLD representatives. I decided to go for a ride on my motorbike to see what was going on, and indeed there were military trucks and soldiers with guns blocking the roads. It felt so wrong—as if we were going backwards. I feared we would be disconnected from the outside world very soon. I had all these thoughts spinning around in my head, and I knew that the military was going to torture us. Despite the tragic news, I decided to go to the office. On the way, I got stopped by a soldier that wouldn't let me enter the district where our office was. I had to talk to him for a while, until he finally let me go.

***“I decided to go for a ride on my motorbike to see what was going on, and indeed there were military trucks and soldiers with guns blocking the roads. It felt so wrong, as if we were going backwards.”***

When the coup happened, I was working as a field staff and interpreter in a social enterprise. Our main office was in Myitkyina, but we mostly worked in villages close to the Chinese border. Everything became so difficult for us after the coup. First off, we suddenly had no access to money because the banks closed, so we couldn't pay salaries or transport fees. Then, because of the internet shutdown, it became challenging for us to communicate with the local partners implementing our projects. After two months, we finally decided we couldn't keep the enterprise running, so I'm jobless now.

All my work worries haven't stopped me from participating in the resistance movement. As soon as the coup happened, we went out into the streets, and we continue to do so, this time in the form of so-called 'guerrilla strikes'. Unfortunately, one of my friends from the student union has already been arrested, and we don't even know where he is. Another friend is in jail and has been charged under Section 505(a) of the Penal Code. I have just come back from hiding myself. I was away from home for a month: I feared the military would come look for me after arresting my friends. As I have been very involved in the movement, I am paranoid now. I am scared that one day they'll take my phone and find out all about my involvement and my contacts.

I am not directly involved with the KIA or KIO, but I do have some contacts, and I have been giving them to people who want to join the armed resistance. I encourage them and would also do it myself if it weren't for my parents. I am their only child, and I know it would break their heart. Still, we have agreed that if things get worse, they will allow me to go and fight for our freedom. Until then, I will continue practicing 'civil resistance': not paying taxes and not attending university.

The military sees young people across the country as their enemies. They have been arresting, kidnapping, and killing people every single day. People are under serious pressure to go back to work, since the military arrests anyone participating in the CDM. If they don't or can't find the strikers, they arrest their family members instead. Recently the focus has been on teachers and students who do not want to go to school. Last night we heard six bomb explosions very close to our house. These terrible troubles are what dominate our lives now.

***“We live in a globalized world, and this makes me realize that a fight for democracy in one place is a fight for democracy everywhere, for all citizens. I want to ask the world to help us, not as hypocrites but honestly and truly as human beings.”***

It is a difficult time for us all. To stay strong, I listen to spiritual leaders. I very much like Sadhguru, who said that no one can torture you unless you accept the torturing yourself. What he meant by that is that the power inside of us cannot be taken away unless we give it away ourselves. I also get inspired by the strength and resilience of IDPs in the Kachin and Karen Hills. I tell myself that I still have food and shelter, so I shouldn't complain.

We live in a globalized world. A fight for democracy in one place is a fight for democracy everywhere, for all citizens. I want to ask the world to help us, not as hypocrites but honestly and truly as human beings. We do not have that much hope in the UN anymore due to its bureaucracies, but we do need the National Unity Government (NUG) to be recognized in order for other countries to be able to legally sell arms to them. So please help us with this. At the same time, the military regime must not be recognized as a legal government. Please also allow our Myanmar citizens to get visa extensions in your countries; don't force them to return to an unsafe place. And finally, I would like to ask the international world to send humanitarian assistance to Myanmar—we need urgent help.”



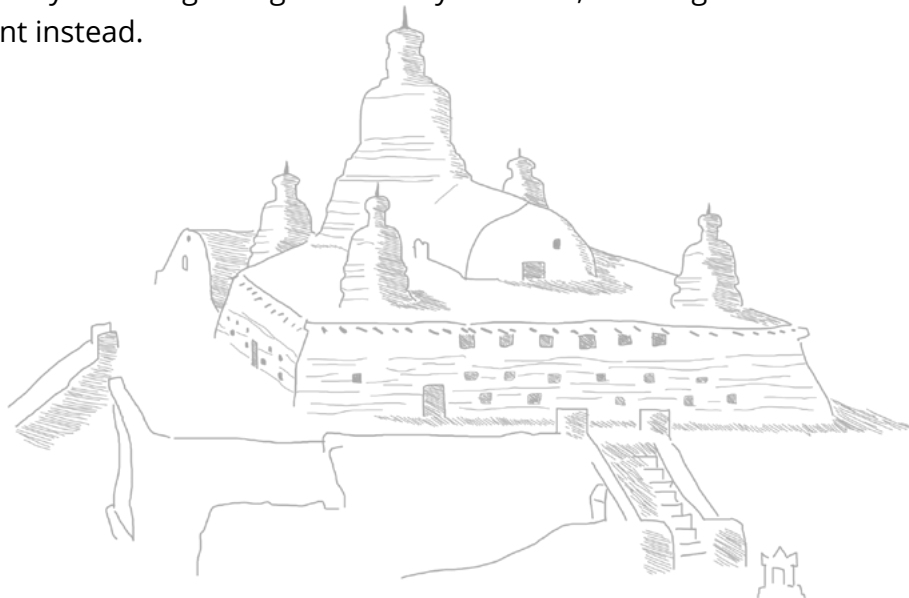
# Rakhine State

Rakhine State is situated in the western part of Myanmar, bordering on Bangladesh (see *Map of Myanmar*). The capital city of Rakhine State is Sittwe, home to around 180,000 inhabitants. Like Kachin State, the state is named after the majority ethnic group living in the region, the Rakhine. Other ethnic groups include Mro, Thet, Khami, Kaman, Daing-Net, Mramagyi, Chin, and Rohingya. Most people in Rakhine State are Buddhists, but there are also Muslim, Christian, and Hindu minorities present.

Rakhine State is one of the poorest and least-developed regions of Myanmar, despite being rich in natural resources (especially oil and gas) and having strategic access to the Indian Ocean. Apart from armed conflict, the state has also experienced bouts of communal violence between its Buddhist and Muslim populations, and a military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslims, resulting in around 1 million Rohingya refugees. Long-term and historical economic, social, and political marginalization of the people in Rakhine State has led to their disillusionment with politics and Myanmar affairs in general.

The Arakan Army (AA) is an ethnic armed organization founded in 2009 to fight for self-determination of the Rakhine people. From late 2018 to late 2020, the AA and Tatmadaw were engaged in intense fighting, which resulted in hundreds of deaths and around 200,000 internally displaced (see *Story of Ko Pray Zon*). The previous National League for Democracy (NLD) government played an important role in the conflict: in January 2019, it directed the military to carry out clearance operations against the AA, and in March 2020, it designated the AA a terrorist organization. On top of that, the government imposed an internet shutdown in the region, which lasted nearly two years and thereby became the world's longest government-enforced internet shutdown. These are some of the reasons why the NLD party is not too popular in the state (see *Story of Khin Thandar* and *Story of Ko Pray Zon*).

The fighting between the AA and Tatmadaw finally quieted down in November 2020, a few months before the coup. In the coup's aftermath, the new military regime first lifted the internet restrictions in the region and later removed the AA from the list of terrorist organizations. This has meant that people in Rakhine State have been experiencing at least some degree of normalcy in recent months, which also explains why only a few protests have taken place in the state. The AA has stayed relatively silent regarding the military takeover, focusing on their own regional stability and development instead.





## Story of Khin Thandar



**Khin Thandar comes from a small village in Rakhine State. She is actively involved with a number of Arakan civil society organizations and youth groups. She was interviewed on May 2nd.**

"I was in Yangon when the coup happened. I had a lot of missed calls from my friends and activists I work with that night, and when I finally answered one at around 4:30 a.m., I found out there had been a military coup. Actually, I wasn't that shocked, I had suspected the coup would happen. My first thought was that, based on our experience in Rakhine State, people needed to prepare for an internet shutdown and for not being able to communicate with their loved ones. So, I began to calmly spread this message with my network.

In contrast to many of my friends, I never really thought of going out into the streets to protest against the coup. You know, while people in Yangon and NLD supporters—mostly from the Bamar majority—were experiencing the so-called 'democratic transition' in recent years, we in Rakhine State continued to live and suffer under a military dictatorship. After the coup, these very same groups began calling for unity of all of Myanmar, but where were they when our ethnic people were dying in communal and armed conflicts? It is unfair and very painful. Actually, many people in Rakhine State feel as much distrust and even hatred towards the Bamar majority as they do towards the military.

***"My first thought was that, based on our experience in Rakhine State, people needed to prepare for an internet shutdown and for not being able to communicate with their loved ones."***

Because of this, I felt a little out of place in Yangon after the coup, so I decided to go back to my home state. When I arrived, I met with some youth who were thinking of organizing a protest. We discussed it for a while, especially the high risk of getting arrested or even killed, since the military presence in Rakhine State is much bigger than in Yangon. We asked ourselves: Who is it exactly we would be protesting for? And do we deserve to get jailed or killed for that? In the end, we decided against it. That is why Rakhine State is 'silent' now: we don't talk about the military, and there is no CDM here.

What affected my life post-coup the most have been the progressive internet shutdowns. I had to cancel many of my plans, like an online civic education course for university students that I had been preparing together with some of my seniors. I was also unable to move abroad for my master's studies as I had originally planned, since my flight got cancelled in part due to the coup here and in part due to a Covid-19 outbreak over there. Luckily, I can study online, but I've had to move a couple of times in order to secure a stable internet connection. What I feel sad about though is that most young people in Myanmar do not have the opportunity to study at all at the moment—whether online or offline—which means they are basically losing their future.



***“What I feel sad about though is that most young people in Myanmar do not have the opportunity to study at all at the moment—whether online or offline—which means they are basically losing their future.”***

Of course, the coup has also affected me and everyone around me psychologically. The constant stream of bad news is heart-breaking. When I get too stressed, I spend time alone, go for walks on the beach, listen to music, or exercise. Sometimes, I write down my thoughts and feelings about what's going on in the country.

In my family there are different opinions on the current events, so it has become a very sensitive topic for us. For the first few weeks after the coup, we couldn't even discuss it. I experienced something similar with my personal network as well. First, I was sharing my opinions about the political situation very openly, both online and offline. But then this led to fights with friends and other activists, and people began accusing me of being selfish, so in the end, I decided to stay silent.

I feel like everyone wants to get media attention nowadays, but I would say that the world needs to listen to the unheard voices in Myanmar before it overgeneralizes the situation in the country. I'm personally worried about my state, because in contrast to the past when there was a lot of discussion, Rakhine State is now silent. It feels scary and I worry there will be more fighting in the future.”

***“The world needs to listen to the unheard voices in Myanmar before it overgeneralizes the situation in the country.”***

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## Story of Ko Pray Zon



**Ko Pray Zon is an NGO and social worker in Rakhine State. He was interviewed on April 26th.**

"I was very surprised to receive the news of the coup on February 1st. On that day, I was in Kyauktaw Township in the northern part of Rakhine State, not in Sittwe where I normally live. The phone lines had already been cut when we woke up, and since we knew that only the government would be capable of orchestrating such a total shutdown, everybody assumed that something wrong was going on. In the leadup to the coup, we had heard in the news that the Myanmar military might not let the new civilian government be established, so we suspected it might be just that. Still, we were shocked, since we always thought that the Myanmar military and the NLD government were working together.

Before the military coup and under the previous NLD government, the Rakhine people suffered a lot from the ongoing armed conflicts in the state. Many people have become IDPs, without a home or even a decent place to live, and some have been affected psychologically as well as economically. People here have always been victims of the Myanmar military and there is not much we have been able to do to ease the situation. What's worse, when the military beat us, arrested us, or burned our villages down, the NLD government didn't do or say anything. There's been no justice, and there's been no support for IDPs either. Only Rakhine people are sending food, clothes, and money to them. That is why most Rakhine people neither like nor trust the NLD government. There is a general feeling of sadness and frustration among us here; we feel like they have failed us.

***"There is no CDM in Rakhine State. We do show our support for the movement on Facebook, but nothing is actually happening on the ground."***

Our experiences after the coup have also been very different from the rest of the country. The internet shutdown imposed in Rakhine State almost two years ago was suddenly lifted, and we have been able to use the internet more widely ever since, even though the connection is not great. Moreover, the Myanmar military and the AA have stopped fighting, which means that now we can move around freely within the state, without having to worry about our safety. Before, there were military checkpoints everywhere, and we had to be careful all the time.

There is no CDM in Rakhine State. We do show our support for the movement on Facebook, but nothing is actually happening on the ground. Instead, Rakhine State is busy dealing with the aftermath of the past conflicts: there are landmines in and around villages, and the internally displaced still cannot return to their homes because they were destroyed by the military.

I know my experience of the coup is different from my friends elsewhere in the country. I feel sad that this is happening. I use social media to show that I reject the military coup, and I try to connect with my friends, ask them how they are doing, and help them, but the only thing I can really do is to encourage them. I have also been welcoming them to Rakhine State, as our situation is more stable and less dangerous now. Indeed, many Rakhine people from Yangon and Mandalay have returned to their home state, and even some Burmese people have arrived in the area. At the same time, some Burmese people are leaving Rakhine State to join the CDM in other parts of the country.

We recently celebrated the New Year Water Festival (Thingyan) in Rakhine State, while the rest of the country boycotted the celebration to show their rejection of the military regime. Actually, the celebrations only took place in villages—I joined one in my village as well—but not in towns, since the sentiment there was more similar to other places in Myanmar. For the past two years, we haven't been able to celebrate Thingyan at all because of the conflicts; last year, an additional reason was the Covid-19 pandemic. Usually, everyone—young people, adults, the elderly—join the celebrations all over Rakhine State. People celebrate by throwing water, going from one place to another, and enjoying music, drinks, and food. Older people visit monasteries to listen to Buddha's teachings preached by monks.

In the last few months before the coup, I was managing two different programs: one on youth empowerment and another on agriculture. I was applying to some donors for funding, but I'm out of luck, since many NGOs have cancelled their projects in the area due to the many inconveniences, such as the banks not working. I don't want to ask for donations from people here because I know they are struggling to survive. These are challenging times for us, as for many other projects and businesses in the state.

When it comes to the future, I trust the AA 100%. Whenever there is a problem, a minor or more significant criminal case, it is reported to the AA administration departments, where the problem gets solved. The establishment of the AA village administration had already started before the coup. Now there are AA village chiefs appointed to solve issues, and these chiefs' rule under the AA law. This way, I believe we have a better chance of becoming independent, restoring the Arakan State, and getting self-determination for the Rakhine people.

I want to ask the outside world to share our current situation online, through social and printed media, so people around the world will get more involved. The international community has the power to stop the military from perpetuating human rights abuses against civilians. If possible, I would also like to ask people from the outside to send financial help to Myanmar, as many people are joining the CDM and thus struggling to make a living. This way, we can keep the resistance movement going strong."

***“The international community has the power to stop the military from perpetuating human rights abuses against civilians.”***



# *What Can YOU Do*

Dear reader,

Thank you for reading. By giving your time and showing your interest in these nine stories, you have prioritized what's happening in Myanmar over all the other pressing issues of today's world. Even though international news coverage of Myanmar is slowly declining, the struggle of its people for a more just, free, and equal society continues. If you would like to support this struggle, there are a number of ways in which you can do so. Remember, every little help; even the smallest actions or contributions can make a big difference.

## **1. Share this publication with your networks**

Raising awareness about the continuing crisis in Myanmar is crucial. When using social media platforms, you are welcome to include the following hashtags: #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar #HearTheVoicesOfMyanmar #RespectOurVotes #SaveMyanmar #CDM #CrimesAgainstHumanity #MilkTeaAlliance

## **2. Put pressure on your government**

People around the world have been staging protests and advocating to their governments to take stronger actions against the military regime in Myanmar. Check if you could join such initiatives in your area, or even start one yourself. You could also reach out directly to your representatives through letters, emails, or phone calls.

## **3. Support local media and activists**

Journalists and activists in Myanmar have been brutally persecuted in the past few months. The military regime has revoked media licenses of many outlets, raided their offices, and issued arrest warrants for their staff. The use of satellite dishes that provide access to independent news has been banned. As of June 10th, approximately 50 journalists have been jailed, while many others continue their work in hiding. Follow and support those who risk their lives and freedoms to report from inside the country:

- *Frontier Myanmar* (media outlet): [www.frontiermyanmar.net](http://www.frontiermyanmar.net)
- *Myanmar Now* (media outlet): [www.myanmar-now.org](http://www.myanmar-now.org)
- *The Irrawaddy* (media outlet): [www.irrawaddy.com](http://www.irrawaddy.com)
- *Justice for Myanmar* (activist network): [www.justiceformyanmar.org](http://www.justiceformyanmar.org)

#### 4. Support the civil disobedience movement and delivery of humanitarian aid

In their struggle against the military regime, people in Myanmar are sacrificing their lives, securities, freedoms, and incomes every day. Many have lost jobs or have had to flee their homes. A number of online fundraising campaigns are trying to address these urgent needs, and many of them are accessible through the following websites:

- *I Support Myanmar* (platform with links to various fundraisers and suggestions for advocacy in your region): [www.isupportmyanmar.com](http://www.isupportmyanmar.com)
- *Mutual Aid Myanmar* (group of activists, academics, and policy makers with local and trusted distribution partners across the country): [www.mutualaidmyanmar.org](http://www.mutualaidmyanmar.org)

Other fundraising campaigns have been started by international organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders, International Rescue Committee, Action Aid UK, and Save the Children. You are also welcome to do your own research and find your own way to support the people in Myanmar.

Thank you!

The 'Real Stories Not Tales' Team

**Note:** For security reasons, young people featured in the nine stories do not use their real names. Similarly, the team responsible for this publication has to remain anonymous, but we hope our commitment and reliability is visible throughout the pages. Real Stories Not Tales will be back in a few months with more stories from Myanmar. If you would like to contact us, please do so by sending an email to: [realstoriesnottales@protonmail.com](mailto:realstoriesnottales@protonmail.com).

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