

## **Whom are we forgetting in Myanmar's internal wars?**

News on conflict in Myanmar by now is a media genre of its own and it has been dominated by the "Rohingya crisis" for the last few years. It is justified, no doubt. Which other smouldering conflict within Myanmar is yielding 700,000 victims?

This crisis has been such a major human tragedy that it soaked up all the attention, allowing the Burmese military (the Tatmadaw) to terrorise other ethnic groups with little notice of the international community. I say "Burmese military" (and not Myanmar military) because it is composed predominantly of ethnic Burmese conscripts and serves Burmese generals. This is not to imply, however, that this ethnic group should somehow share the blame, rather – to illustrate the stark division between numerous ethnic groups and the absence of legitimacy of the Burmese military in the country.

Last month I read the "*Report of the detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar*" by the UN fact-finding mission. Very first page stated that serious human rights violations and abuses were found in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States. This serves justice for the embattled ethnic communities in Kachin and Shan States, but what do we know of these states?

Many foreigners know Shan State for pleasant boat rides on Inle lake, a UNESCO world heritage site. However, within a few hours drive, in the "brown zone" behind military check points, a different reality unfolds for the local Shans. In one of the interviews a young man from Loi Lem was telling how six Tatmadaw soldiers came to their house at midnight, tied his elderly father and took him away. Not hearing from the father or getting any answers from the military for a week, son went looking for him in the forests outside the village. He found his father beaten to death and lying alongside two other dead farmers (Report A/HRC/39/CRP.2, para 149). UN Mission's interviews point to several instances of unlawful detention, torture and execution of civilians by the Burmese military. This appears to happen on weekly basis and no justice ensues – laws and courts have been instrumental to oppression since the 1962 *coup d'état*, *rule of law* is synonymous with *rule by (utilising) law*.

One other important highlight by UN fact-finding mission is that the Tatmadaw continues hostilities against the signatories of the much celebrated 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) (Report A/HRC/39/CRP.2, para 107). At the beginning of November, Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), one of the most important signatories, had announced that they were temporarily suspending their participation in the peace process. Political analysts agree - the peace process is at a low point.

Such situation also puts some 6,000 Shan refugees in a precarious situation. They can't go back home because of the fighting, but the aid of international donors has been cut on the account of the NCA signature. Instead, foreign investments have now been diverted towards the government-led Joint Peace Fund – it has received over EUR 100 m in pledged capital.

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