Daniel Sullivan:
Hello, everyone. Thanks for joining. My name is Dan Sullivan. I'm the Deputy Director for Africa, Asia, and the Middle East with Refugees International. I also want to thank several groups that help to bring us together, including Global Witness and Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and several others.

We’re gathering today to talk with some civil society leaders from the region and from Burma that have been at the front lines of pushing back on what's happened since the February 1st coup of last year. And I'll turn to them in just a minute. And we'll also be hearing from the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Meeks, who is also the sponsor of the Burma Act, who will join us with some prerecorded comments. Just for logistical purposes, this will be on the record and is being recorded, and we'll share a transcript with journalists after this as well.

Just some context setting comments before I turn it over. We're looking at a year since the February 1st military coup in Burma. This has been a, as UN officials have said, a multidimensional crisis with political, health, economic, human rights, and humanitarian consequences. We're focusing today on those humanitarian consequences where we've seen the needs just explode from nearly 1 million people who are estimated to be in need of humanitarian aid pre-coup to now more than 14 million in 2022. The number of people internally displaced has nearly doubled as well with more than 320,000 people newly displaced over the past year. And we've seen some 25,000 refugees flow into other countries, including especially India and Thailand.

We'll hear from our speakers a little bit more about this, but there's both a need to address the root causes with the Myanmar military through increased international pressure, and a lot of that is contained in the Burma Act. But there's also need to take some more immediate steps to address the humanitarian crisis, steps like working with Myanmar's neighbors, particularly Thailand, to facilitate cross-border aid through local networks, and also working with Myanmar’s neighbors to ensure that when refugees come across, they are not forced back and that there is safe access to the UN Refugee Agency and for international NGOs to help refugees that come across.

We'll hear more about that from our speakers in just a minute, but let me start by introducing a prerecorded message from Representative Meeks, and would ask that the technical folks please start that now. Thanks.

U.S. Representative Gregory Meeks:
Hello. I want to thank Refugee International and all of the other organizations gathered here for having me and for working so diligently on behalf of the people of Burma. What we saw on February 1st, 2021, and what the people of Burma have experienced every day since, is one of the starkest and most horrific examples of democratic backsliding in recent history. The Burmese military usurped the will of the people, upended the fragile democratic transition that was taking root and created an acute humanitarian crises through indiscriminate violence, and undermined all of the commitments it had made to the United States and the international community when the political transition began in 2011.

What has given me hope, though, is the reaction, the resolve, and the courage of the Burmese people. I’m reminded of something that the late, great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Said, and I quote, "Courage is an inner resolution to go forward despite obstacles. Cowardice is submissive surrender to circumstances. Courage breeds creativity. Cowardice represses fear and is mastered by it." Through the civil disobedience, their shadow government, the people of Burma have responded to terror, torture, and murder with courage, creativity, and resolve. They will not go back to the days of endless martial rule.
And I look forward to passage of a bill that I have put forward. It's a bipartisan Burma Act. In the House, we should have it on in a few weeks. It is vital that the Senate do the same, so that President Biden can sign this bill into law. The United States and its partners, the United Nations, and [Nasian 00:05:28] all need to do more to apply economic and diplomatic pressure on the military junta to end the killings and detentions and create a path back toward a democratic transition. A year may have passed, but I assure you that our focus and commitment remains unchanged. Thank you very much.

Daniel Sullivan:
I want to thank Congressman Meeks for those messages. And before I turn it to the speakers, just to underscore the importance of the Burma Act which includes, among other things, the authorization of much needed humanitarian aid. It calls for the US to lead on such measures as further targeted sanctions and the global arms embargo. And then, also, something that Refugees International and allies have been pushing for a long time, a genocide determination in the case of the Rohingya, which was very important to addressing the impunity that we've seen with the Myanmar military.

So with that, I want to turn it over three speakers who we're fortunate to be joined from, who can give us accounts on how things have developed on the ground and what they are doing. We have Za Uk, who is the Deputy Executive Director of the Chin Human Rights Organization. Banya, who is a former Karenni refugee and human rights activist and founder of the Karenni Human Rights Group. And Ko Ye, who's an activist on natural resources and corruption in Myanmar. First, I'd like to turn it over to Za Uk from the Chin Human Rights Organization.

Za Uk:
Hi. Good morning, everyone, and good evening from India. I'd like to begin my remarks this evening with something personal that has shaken me recently as a human being and as a human rights activist. On January 6th, my former colleague at the Chin Human Rights Organization, Pu Tui Dim, was among a group of 10 people who were arrested and later brutally massacred by the Tatmadaw soldiers in Chin State.

My ex-colleague had gone missing after he was seen taken away by soldiers and was suspected dead, and we began a desperate scramble to establish contacts on the ground and gather information. With the military having cut phone lines and internet connections in the area, it was an agonizing effort. Finally, on January 9th, our worst fears were confirmed. According to evidence we collected from sources on the ground, the captives hands had been tied behind your backs and their mouths gagged. And some were stabbed repeatedly in the abdomen and some had their throats slashed.

The incident highlights the horror and destruction that the military continues to bring upon the people of Burma as it desperately tries to cling to power nearly one year since its staged a coup. As the military commits human rights abuse with alarming intensity across the country, my colleagues and I at the [inaudible 00:09:16] Human Rights organization have been documenting situation in Burma's Northwest. Arbitrary arrest and detention of civilians, torture, extrajudicial execution, indiscriminate shelling of civilian neighborhoods and towns, nighttime raids and destruction of private properties have all become part of the daily existence in the entire region.
The reign of terror imposed by the regime has pushed more people to take up arms against the military as a last resort. And as the [inaudible 00:09:58] resistant movement has grown, the military has retaliated against the entire civilian population. As many as up to 20% of the population of Chin State has now become displaced in a matter of months since the coup. We have at least 30,000 refugees in Mizoram State of India and close to 50,000 people internally displaced within Chin State itself.

The military has deliberately sought to obstruct the collection of evidence of its abuses. It has blocked mobile internet services in 24 townships in Burma's Northwest since September and, at times, shut down mobile phone networks, as well. On top of this, it has, at times, imposed martial law, including movement restriction, as it attempts to make it more dangerous for people to collect ground information.

The coup has further emboldened the military, which already stands accused of genocide for its treatment of the Rohingyas, to kill and destroy anyone and anything in its path. Having been documenting the military's human rights abuse for more than two decades, I'm well familiar with its brutal tactics, but I have rarely come across the extent of spine-chilling inhumanity, which the military has shown across the country in recent months. On December 23rd, it launched indiscriminate air strikes on two Chin villages in Sagaing Region after suffering heavy casualties to the local resistant forces in the preceding days. As civilians tried to flee, soldiers stormed the village, killing at least 19 civilians.

On Christmas Eve, military forces massacred at least 35 people, including women, children, and aid workers in Karenni State and burned them in their vehicles. The military has also attacked my hometown of [Tentla 00:12:23] at least 20 times over the past four months, burning more than 800 houses to the ground and displacing the entire population of more than 10,000 people. Deprived of access to basic medical attention and nutritious food, more than 30 people from Tentla, mostly elderly, have died while fleeing, according to the tally conducted by my organization.

Since January 9th, the military has sent at least 500 troop reinforcements as well as large quantity of arms and ammunitions to Burma's Northwest, while bombarding Loikaw in Karenni State in Southeastern Burma, and sending its 90,000 residents fleeing.

This past year, my colleagues and I have too many losses and too much suffering and destruction, and we are increasingly feeling abandoned in our efforts to stop the military for committing further human rights abuse. In this regard, I'd like to urge lawmakers in the United States Congress to work together in a bipartisan manner for the swift passage of the Burma Act, which is our best hope for the achievement of democracy and human rights in Burma. Thank you very ...

Daniel Sullivan:
Thank you very much, [Zaook 00:14:09]. And unfortunately, all these kinds of things happening are not limited to one part of the country, so I want to go now to the other side of the country to Banya, who's going to join us from Karenni State. Banya, please go ahead.

Banya Khung Aung:
Thank you, sir. Just a short moment, can I show my face? After that, I will turn off [inaudible 00:14:36] video due to the very poor internet connections. Yes, thank you. Again, my name is Banya, director of the Karenni Human Rights Group. I mean, I share some just very recent human rights violations that are [inaudible 00:15:00] by the military [inaudible 00:15:01].

Just this morning, about 10:00 AM, our Loikaw volunteer, they calls and informs there they found six dead body buried in the hole [inaudible 00:15:20] in the home. These were just found very recently. Certainly, alls are young mens, aged between 18 to 25. And they are arrested between on the
24 and 23rd of this January, during the so-called military agenda called [inaudible 00:15:46] Cleaning Operations in Loikaw.

And then we heard that not only that amounts, and also we can confirm that another a number also womens are in their arrested number. But we just found only six dead body. All are mens. All are young mens. But we found ... But we reported also a woman also arrested and then partially, or is ... We cannot confirm that they've been also sexually abused or raped or [inaudible 00:16:24] happens. But we are still in the confirming process so far. This still happening today.

We just found today is the body were killed onto [inaudible 00:16:36] 25 around noontime, went the [inaudible 00:16:42] approach into the village we called [Nanato 00:16:51] is [inaudible 00:16:55] one of the one in the Loikaw. [inaudible 00:16:59] small village. We do confirm that the soldier from light divisions are [inaudible 00:17:08] 55 and 99. This is the latest happenings, just in a few hour [inaudible 00:17:16].

And then when we go [inaudible 00:17:19] again, on the 22, another arrest and a killings again have been in the area we call the [Sismai 00:17:28] in the Demoso townships that are betweens the Loikaw and Demoso. They arrested more than 10 people. Two of them are confirmed that they are from the other IDP, who jump back to the Sismai village for grabbing anything that he can eat and can be used for their family. And then they would disappear, and then we have found some dead body of the two [inaudible 00:18:00]

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:18:04]

Banya Khung Aung:
[inaudible 00:18:01]. This is another very recently, and the other arrested number are not confirmed yet, or either, or neither, they were not released so far yet. It's a bet again, on the 12th of January, two local vendors were killed and burned by the military. They did that again, in the [Bolicare 00:18:33] township. The road mainly between Bolicare and [Iractid 00:18:41], about that as well. The road number [Detimy 00:18:45], this is very nearby the military small arm posts, on the 12 mine. So really, it's another very crucial [Shimur 00:18:55] revolution that happens.

Then, according to our [Shimurite 00:19:01] records and also the civilian casualties, we have up to 178 civilians have been killed during these things after the coup. Then, one of our highlights is that up to 97, of the amount of the 178, up to 97 have been arrested or detained, and tortured and killed. This is very horrible. That's including the most direct kill on Christmas Eve in the Mosul consulate.

Now, we are counting all together, about 45 persons dead. Among them are three, what are they called [VGF 00:20:02], under the military government. One of them, they are armed personnel, gun force. Borrowed gun force.

Then, surely, there are about 39% were being killed before or burnt out, or burnt after killed. We cannot confirm 100% yet, but so far, according to that doctor, our screening process mentioned that most of them were killed before burning, but some of them are burnt alive because we saw some smoke through, in there, and also in their heart. In the lungs also. We found some smoke there.

This is again, so we are so, I'll just say, quite in fear of the current conditions of the refugees who are fleeing 20 states, or flees from [Raikor 00:21:11], Demoso and [Pluso 00:21:14]. Things are certain, but this last number, or almost all of the civilians from the Demoso town had fled their homes and been, stayed there for IDP, in several areas across the state and even inside the state.

Again, on the 25th, after in Mosul, the nearby Plosu. Almost all, I consider all of the residents of the Pluso town had left their home, left their town, and had taken security in the Western part of Pluso.
Again, on the 6th and 7th, heavy fighting happened abroad, in Raikor, and then, after seven, eight, 7th to about 15th of January. Another, at least 20,000 to 9,000. 70,000 to 90,000, the local residents from Raikor have been displaced again. Most of them are heading to the shell state, especially in the towns, seasides and then another, like inland, and eventually at [Bilau 00:22:38].

Another hard attack again, the day the military agenda used not only the alternative, or the mortar, or the shell into the civilian place. Also, they are shelling, they are very aiming, targeted and sharing into the IDP population or IDP camp. This happens at least, in January, this happened three times so far.

One time, the shelling in the [Namacoles 00:23:08] and by the artillery or mortar, and again, a few things, also January, also using air strikes again on Namacoles. It was a whole thing, 1,000-odd people, 1000 IDP. When they were shelling, they killed at least two local volunteers. This is very shameful for the military, and also this is a very hard attack for us.

Also, on the 17th of January, early mornings as well, so another shelling in the area, where they killed three people, including two young girls. This is all what we've been seeing, and 1,000 people are now sitting around, and also, at least 170,000 from the IDPs were living across, they're displaced, and also living here across, in the city, in the state of Afghanistan. But we are so much worried about their lives, as well, they are scared, and also the weather, and also the food, and the rations, and the shelter also. They are needing a bit of shelter.

I hope, I think, my readings of the Shimurite and the refugee condition and as well, the conflict, as they are going through every day. Thank you so much.

Daniel Sullivan:

Thanks so much for sharing that. Really tough things to hear but really important to be bearing witness to those. Appreciate it and I want to turn now to our final speaker, Ko Ye, who's been a long time activist on natural resources and on corruption in Myanmar. Ko Ye, please go ahead.

U.S. Representative Gregory Meeks:

Thank you, Daniel, for inviting me, and thank you all, brothers and sisters, for giving me an opportunity to inform these very important events. Before I'm saying that, that my brothers inform me is frivolous, explains about the very tragedy and heart-breaking, [Nimbos 00:25:20], [Favios 00:25:21] and what happened in Myanmar. So those people are our people dying on the streets. The murdering, terrorisings, rapings, and the bomb shellings, mass atrocity, war crimes, crimes against humanity, that's committed by the terrorists, the military juntas. It's that.

We need to think about why this happened. Why Min Aung Hlaing is making this stupid coup? Why he made that kind of stupid decision? I can explain to you. One thing is about natural resources. Revenue from the natural resources. The military is enjoying the natural resources since long times ago. After 1988 revolutions, the military coup happens. After that, they establish the technique of MEC and [MEHOs 00:26:24].

Those that were not techniques, or military comrades, this is running and generating revenue for military generals, in passing. Also, for the institution. They are not only, how to say it, the running this kind of technique, but also, they also control all the state-owned enterprises, especially in the extra states. One gas, mining, gemstones. Those who are overseeing this...
U.S. Representative Gregory Meeks:

Gemstone and those who is overseeing those natural sources as the government is controlled by the military experts. When we are working in this extractive status, in the Myanmar Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative process, we understand that the military is controlling those all state owned enterprise. And those state owned enterprise is making licensing. They are also giving the license, regulating the status. They are also the one part of investor, and they are also the revenue collectors and they are also doing the revenue allocation from this status.

So, that is why all the natural source in Myanmar, the majors of primary rich resources is controlled by the military directly and remaining are controlled by their affiliates. In the natural resource area, there’s no civilian or no ordinary people who are not connected with the military. So, this is our concern. The reason Min Aung Hlaing make decision for coup, for enjoying our natural sources with a correct assistance with the full impunity not punish or not investigate.

So, this is a reason the coup is happen. At the same time, the weapons and ammunition used by military is coming from the natural resources. We Myanmar people never enjoying our sources and those specially like oil index, right now this is a major source of that line of the terrorist military that terrorizes our people. This is why we need to stop the bloodline of the military, the main source of the many of the terrorist military junta.

So this is the most important things right now that we need to sort out. Otherwise, as my brother says, those tragedies and those are innocent people will continue killing. This is just why the international community and the government like US government need to take action very, very urgently, immediately taking action on cutting the revenue which is going to the military. So like the recent days, Total Energy and Chevron from US and France, they announced the withdrawal from Myanmar in next six months. But many is still going to the junta. So we need to stop it. The best way we can stop the manufacture immediately is the sanction Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, MOGE, so Myanmar people across the globe and our brothers and sisters in the diaspora around the globe is unitedly calling together to imposing the sanction of Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise. We need immediate action on that. So our western partners, the democratic country, especially like US government, that condemns our situation but we need the tangible action. So I want to quote the President Biden quote in the Democratic Summit, he said that democracy doesn’t happen by accident.

We have to defend, fight for it, [inaudible 00:31:28], yes, this is a brainwash. So now we need to defend our people. We need to defend democracy in Myanmar. We need to restore democracy in Myanmar. This is why our elective request President Biden to impose sanction on the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise immediately. That can stop the tragedy and [inaudible 00:31:53] happen in Myanmar. So that can be reduce losing the life of Myanmar. At the same time the US government need to recognize National Unity Government, NUG, the representatives of the people to fight back the terrorists military junta. So I want to request the international community, especially the US government, we need prompt action. We need the tangible action right now. So please, sanction MOGE immediately. Thank you very much.

Daniel Sullivan:

Thank you, Ko Ye and thank you to all the speakers to [Zao] Banya and Ko Ye and to Congressman Meeks. I think we heard a very clear message of the threat of ongoing atrocities and a much worsening, quickly worsening humanitarian situation and the need for tangible action through action taken through the Burma Act and others like cross border aid and the situation as we go into this one year since the coup started is really urgent. So again, I thank our speakers and thank everyone for joining.
If anyone has any further questions, please be in touch with Sarah Sheffer at Refugees International who will be sure to share the transcript script from this call. Thank you.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [00:33:27]