



CAMP CLOSURES:

Current Status for Rohingya and Kaman Muslims in Kyaukpyu and Sittwe (May 2023)

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Background

Camps in Rakhine State can be generally understood as falling into two broad categories: (1) camps hosting Rohingya and Kaman Muslim people who were displaced as a result of intercommunal violence in 2012, and (2) camps primarily hosting people displaced by fighting between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar military in 2018–2020. For more information on recent developments relating to the closure of 2018–era camps, please refer to [Camp Closures: Current Status \(April 2023\)](#).

The 2012 camps have their origins in two waves of violence across Rakhine State in 2012. The violence has been termed ‘intercommunal’, and involved attacks on Rohingya and Kaman Muslims and their properties by Rakhine communities, although Myanmar armed forces have also been implicated in the violence against Muslims.¹ During the violence, Rohingya and Kaman Muslims were largely ejected from urban areas in central Rakhine State, and those displaced now remain, for the most part, interned in camps in rural and semi-urban areas by security forces and checkpoints that prevent movement. Many of these camps are located around Sittwe, where nearly 100,000 mostly Rohingya people are held in highly restrictive environments. New movement restrictions were also put in place for other Muslims living in rural areas after 2012. Those in camps have little freedom of movement, highly restricted access to services such as health and education, and few opportunities for livelihoods and income generation.

Efforts by national-level authorities to ‘close’ the camps hosting Rohingya and Kaman communities have been ongoing since before the coup. Under the National League for Democracy administration, camps in Kyauktaw and Myebon Townships were officially announced closed in 2018 and 2020, respectively. However, these processes were marked by a lack of consultation with camp residents and other stakeholders, and camp residents were not permitted to return to their places of origin. Instead, authorities coerced residents to move to a newly constructed site near the camp by prohibiting repairs on shelters in the existing camp site.

The new site was classified as a village rather than a camp, but camp residents were not permitted any new freedom of movement or access to rights, services or livelihoods, effectively reinforcing their segregation from Rakhine communities.

In 2019, the quasi-civilian government released its ‘National Strategy on Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Closure of IDP Camps’, and announced Kyauk Ta Lone camp, Kyaukpyu Township as a pilot camp closure. As detailed below, the camp ‘closure’ process in Kyauk Ta Lone has again resembled a ‘reclassification’, with few improvements in conditions for communities pushed to relocate to a new site even further from livelihoods.

Data collection and analysis for this update was conducted before Cyclone Mocha made landfall in western Myanmar, and it is not clear what impact the latest humanitarian catastrophe to strike the region will have on the military’s attempts to ‘close’ camps.

¹ “‘All You Can Do is Pray’ Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma’s Arakan State”, Human Rights Watch, 22 Apr 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>.

Kyaukpyu Township: Kyauk Ta Lone Camp Closure

Kyauk Ta Lone

Camp Data:²

- Population: 1,087
- Households: 380
- Area(s) of origin: Kyaukpyu town
- Displaced since: 2012

The process to close Kyauk Ta Lone camp began under the National League for Democracy administration in early 2020. Following the 1 February 2021 military coup, military authorities took a renewed interest in the process. The camp is located outside the urban area and hosts 380 households who were displaced from urban Kyaukpyu in 2012. A relocation site has been identified near the camp and construction of shelters is complete, although camp residents report that electricity and water services remain absent for some shelters.

Camp residents have consistently objected to the relocation site and advocated for return to their places of origin, in downtown Kyaukpyu, but these requests have routinely been denied by successive authorities, despite indications that relations between the Rakhine and mostly-Kaman Muslim communities are improving.³ The relocation site is farther from healthcare services and livelihood opportunities near the urban area, and is also flood-prone. While authorities have attempted to improve water run-off at the new site, this will be tested by the upcoming monsoon expected within the next month. Barring the ability to return to their places of origin, residents have said that they prefer to remain at the current site rather than the designated relocation site.⁴

Despite community concerns and advocacy from the international community, relocations to the new site began in April 2023.⁵ Local-level military authorities told the community on 20 April that relocations would begin on 23 April and should be completed by 15 May.

According to sources in the camps, only some 30 out of 380 households in the camp have relocated. Others are reportedly adopting a ‘wait and see’ approach, while others claim that relocating is not possible due to the high cost of relocation or damage already evident on houses in the relocation site.

As in Kyauktaw and Myebon Townships, the camp ‘closure’ process in Kyauk Ta Lone is rather a ‘reclassification’, where no improvement in conditions is provided and segregation and dispossession of land are reinforced.

The SAC has continued to develop a relocation site which, though adjacent to the current camp location, is significantly more flood-prone, farther from livelihood opportunities and residents’ homes in Kyaukpyu town, and in close proximity to SAC forces. The new site floods annually, and there are significant concerns about the ability of IDPs to live there with the minimal financial assistance offered.

As the first ‘closure’ since the release of the ‘National Strategy on Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Closure of IDP Camps’, the Kyauk Ta Lone camp closure may set a precedent for other camps in Rakhine State and nationwide, particularly the camps hosting Rohingya and Kaman people who were displaced in 2012. In theory, the logistics of the camp closure process in Kyauk Ta Lone could be relatively simple, given its relatively small population — it hosts only 1,000 residents, compared to Sittwe Township’s 100,000 — and the SAC may be treating this as a pilot before it turns to more populated and complicated camps. As such, responders supporting these communities should prepare for the possibility that additional closures may move forward, and are unlikely to involve any meaningful consultation with communities.

² Camp details taken from interview on file, female, 35, Rakhine State (Kyaukpyu Township), 20 April 2023. This data has not been independently verified by this analytical unit.

³ “Weekly Update for Humanitarian Responders 18-24 November”, 25 November 2022, <https://cass-mm.org/cass-weekly-update-18-24-november-2021/>; “Weekly Update for Humanitarian Responders 20-26 April”, 27 April 2023, <https://cass-mm.org/cass-weekly-update-20-26-april-2023/>.

⁴ “Weekly Update for Humanitarian Responders 28 July-3 August”, 4 August 2022, <https://cass-mm.org/cass-weekly-update-18-24-august-2022/>.

⁵ “Weekly Update for Humanitarian Responders 20-26 April”, 27 April 2023, <https://cass-mm.org/cass-weekly-update-20-26-april-2023/>.



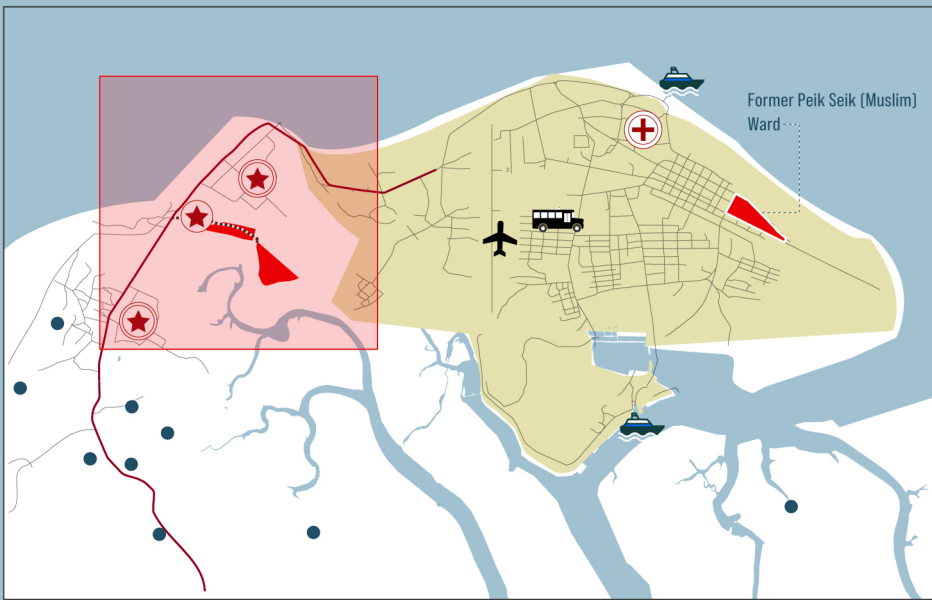
Kyauk Ta Lone Relocation Site, April 2023. Photo: COAR



Kyauk Ta Lone Relocation Site, March 2023. Photo: COAR.



Kyauk Ta Lone Relocation Site, April 2023. Photo: COAR.



Kyauk Ta Lone IDP Camp and Proposed Relocation Site

B a y o f B e n g a l



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Sittwe Township

Current Situation

The Myanmar military's State Administration Council has not been transparent in its plans to close the camps hosting Rohingya and Kaman people displaced in 2012 in Sittwe Township. However, reports continue to emerge of plans to close the camps.

This is not a new process. In 2019, authorities from the quasi-democratic government led by the National League for Democracy conducted a registration process in Basara camp, Sittwe Township, which residents assumed to be related to the closure of the camp. However, the initiative quickly dissipated and no further developments took place.

As a result of the national push towards closing camps, and the ongoing relocation in Kyauk Ta Lone, Kyaukpyu Township, there are indications that camp residents in Sittwe are expecting the closure of their camps, and rumours are beginning to spread. For instance, some camp residents reported hearing from humanitarian workers and members of the Rakhine community that camp closures are impending.⁶ Some even suggested that military authorities have already begun the process internally.⁷ However, any attempts to 'close' the camps in Sittwe are likely to take a considerable amount of time. In previous camp closure instances, such as Kyauk Ta Lone, the process has taken years. The process may take even longer in Sittwe Township, where the population of camps is generally higher, and land for relocation is more scarce than in other, more rural, townships.

Key Community Concerns and Dynamics

The Prospects of Return to Places of Origin

Interviews conducted for this update suggest that returns to places of origin are the first preference for Rohingya camp residents in Sittwe Township. Places of origin for most of those displaced in 2012 from Sittwe Township were displaced from within the township (84 percent), while 11 percent were from Pauktaw Township and three percent from Kyaukpyu Township.⁸ Those displaced from Kyaukpyu were largely from Pike Seik village — now classified as an urban ward — and have previously sought permission from authorities to return to their places of origin. Before the 2021 coup, a group of community members from Pike Seik reportedly submitted a letter requesting to return, but never heard a response.⁹

A key issue regarding returns to places of origin is land ownership and housing, land and property (HLP) rights. Systematic efforts by successive governments to deny Rohingya access to civil documentation has meant that many households had limited land ownership documentation even before displacement in 2012, while others lost their documentation in the violence. Some households have sold their land in places of origin, often in conditions of questionable voluntariness.

Moreover, since 2012, other households and private businesses have established themselves on land in places of origin. In many cases these are vulnerable households, and include low-income migrants from rural areas and families displaced by armed conflict. Many have paid money for the right to use this land, either to other occupants or local authorities, and may not always be aware of any potential illegality of using these lands.

⁶ Interview on file, male, 54, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023; Interview on file, male, 45, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 17 April 2023.

⁷ Interview on file, male, 37, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

⁸ "Sittwe Camp Profiling Report (Rakhine State, Myanmar, 2017)", JIPS, 5 August 2017, <https://www.jips.org/jips-publication/profiling-report-sittwe-rakhine-myanmar-2017/>.

⁹ "Weekly Update for Humanitarian Responders 20-26 April", 27 April 2023, <https://cass-mm.org/cass-weekly-update-20-26-april-2023/>; Interview on file, male, 63, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

We wanted to get our land of origin back and a Rakhine policeman intruded on my family's land even though we have documents about that land. When we told her that land belongs to us with our documents together, she replied she has registered with her name already, so she tried to give us just a small amount of money as snack fees. We did not take it because it was not the land price. They do not have fair justice, although we follow up through the court."

— female, 37, Sittwe Township

In other cases, displaced persons report that returns to places of origin are impossible due to new environmental degradation, including erosion.¹⁰ Many respondents note that, in addition to returns to places of origin, any camp closure process must include citizenship rights and proper land documentation, in addition to freedom of movement, access to livelihoods, and security guarantees, including those regarding social cohesion.¹¹ They note that the SAC is unlikely to grant these demands, however, and thereby highlight the important role of international agencies' support.¹²

While articulating a desire to return to their places of origin, some respondents say they have little hope that the SAC will allow it. One Camp Management Committee (CMC) member told this analytical unit that it is more likely that the SAC will 'relocate' residents in their current area, and the community would have to comply because they have no means of disputing it.¹³

Outward Migration

The sale of land in places of origin is a key barrier to returns, but some communities have sold their land to pursue other solutions to their ongoing displacement. Some have sold land to finance migration to Yangon, Malaysia and elsewhere, either for temporary labour or longer-term residence. As noted above, these land sales are often made for below-market prices and in less-than-voluntary conditions. Youth are likely to attempt to travel for work while sending remittances to families.¹⁴ Given the absence of formal migration channels for the many Rohingya who lack civil documentation, trafficking networks are key to migration, and a large number of Rohingya are regularly arrested by the SAC for movement.¹⁵ Respondents noted that camp residents continue to be arrested for attempting to reach Malaysia.¹⁶ These dynamics also reflect the fact that HLP rights are not just about returning land to displaced persons, but about their ability to use that land; for example, to mortgage it or sell it to financially advance other life plans. As such, HLP rights are fundamentally connected to freedom of movement and access to civil documentation, including citizenship.

Camp Conditions

Shelters and overcrowding

A key concern for communities now living in the Sittwe camps is overcrowding and the conditions of shelters. In Khaung Dokka 1 camp, a respondent notes that the growing population have built shelters in paddy fields to cope with overcrowding, while sanitation is an issue because waste from other areas in the township is dumped in a cemetery near the camp.¹⁷

¹⁰ Interview on file, male, 54, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

¹¹ Interview on file, male, 54, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023; Interview on file, male, 37, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023; Interview on file, male, 38, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

¹² Interview on file, male, 37, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023; Interview on file, male, 45, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 17 April 2023.

¹³ Interview on file, female, 49, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 16 April 2023.

¹⁴ Interview on file, male, 38, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

¹⁵ "Evolving Patterns, Unchanged Suffering: Rohingya Trafficking Trends in 2022", 7 December 2022, <https://cass-mm.org/evolving-patterns-unchanged-suffering-rohingya-trafficking-trends-in-2022/>.

¹⁶ Interview on file, female, 64, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 16 April 2023.

¹⁷ Interview on file, male, 32, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

For some, family members are squeezed into a small room in conditions they reportedly consider shameful. Others live in damaged shelters with fences covered with plastic or tarpaulins.¹⁸ As the monsoon season approaches, camp residents are concerned about the conditions of their shelters.¹⁹

Dealing with CMCs is often challenging for camp residents. In one instance, CMCs are reportedly demanding 300,000–500,000 Myanmar Kyat (~143–239 USD) from camp residents for permission to extend shelters to accommodate growing families. Only a small number of camp residents can afford this, while others spend 4–5 million Myanmar Kyat (~1,909–2,386 USD) to buy land and build houses in nearby villages.²⁰

Food insecurity

Respondents also highlighted that food insecurity is a current challenge. Commodity prices are rising due to inflation,²¹ and respondents noted that current food and cash assistance from humanitarian organisations is not sufficient in these conditions.²² Several noted that they currently struggle to buy food as inflation has outstripped the cash assistance provided by international agencies.²³

Freedom of movement and access to services

Respondents highlighted that movement remains a key issue. While some residents have been able to travel more often in recent years, many still feel insecure doing so,²⁴ and violent crime against Muslim camp residents travelling outside the camps is regularly reported.

While some camp residents have been able to travel to downtown clinics to receive private healthcare in recent years, respondents suggest this is a small subset of the population who can afford these services. Others say they cannot afford to save the money for such treatment, and therefore must rely on healthcare services in the camps, which is more basic. One respondent claimed that the health actor working in his camp gives only paracetamol for any health problem.²⁵

¹⁸ Interview on file, female, 64, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 16 April 2023.

¹⁹ Interview on file, female, 37, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

²⁰ Interview on file, male, 31, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

²¹ Interview on file, male, 63, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

²² Interview on file, female, 64, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 16 April 2023; Interview on file, male, 32, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

²³ Interview on file, female, 64, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 16 April 2023.

²⁴ Interview on file, male, 31, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023; Interview on file, female, 37, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 13 April 2023.

²⁵ Interview on file, male, 45, Rakhine State (Sittwe Township), 17 April 2023.

