

CAMP CLOSURES:

Current Status (November 2022)

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Background

This brief update on the current status facing IDPs in Rakhine, Chin, and Shan States follows an October 2022 report, <u>Situation Update: Camp Closure Crisis</u>. That report detailed several roughly simultaneous State Administration Council (SAC) orders to close IDP camps in three different states across Myanmar, with most deadlines given as the end of October. More recent interviews now suggest that this could be part of a nationwide camp closure policy, which could be announced as early as 11 November.

In this follow up report, this analytical unit spoke to IDP camp leaders, residents, and other sources near to IDPs to look at the current status of several specific camps across the affected states. As this update is based on a small sample size, the observations found here should not be assumed as comprehensive or representative. Rather, this snapshot illustrates the perceptions of community members, and the value of the qualitative approach is in the context-specific knowledge it provides.

As expected, the response to the SAC's closure orders have varied widely depending on context. Some of those who were ordered to close their camps had already done so – as long ago as 2017 – while others were able to comply before October 2022. Some other reported intentions to close their camps within the next six months and are developing plans to do so. Others remain in their sites and have completely disregarded the order; of these, many feel that there is nowhere safe for relocation due to ongoing and escalating armed violence, explosive contamination or troop presence near areas of origin, and a lack of livelihoods, access to basic commodities and services, and support.

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Current Situation

Rakhine State

Buthidaung Township

In early October, SAC officers and township General Administration Department (GAD) officers summoned the leaders of the Yan Aung Myay IDP site, and instructed all IDPs living in the areas surrounding the monastery to return to their homes before 31 October, threatening to arrest any who remained after this date and charge them with squatting and breaking curfew.1 The Yan Aung Myay monastic site in urban Buthidaung Township hosts more than 600 IDPs from at least 171 households, some of whom set up temporary shelters around the site after it reached capacity. IDPs reported being unable to return to areas of origin due to the ongoing and escalating armed violence between the Arakan Army (AA) and the SAC. Additionally, IDPs reported hearing that most houses had been destroyed since they fled in 2018 or 2019 and were used for building shelters at SAC military outposts near these villages.2

"Let's say — if we return our villages — who will build our houses? How will we establish livelihoods? Who will take responsibility for our safety and security? Who will clear the landmines and IEDs in our villages and surrounding areas, farmlands, and mountains?" – female, 25, Yan Aung Myay Monastic Site, urban Buthidaung Township.

Rather than return home — where they face a range of challenging conditions including uncertain shelter and livelihoods, explosive contamination, and other security risks — IDPs report that they have decided to relocate within the Yan Aung Myay Monastery camp.³ Most IDPs in the surrounding areas deconstructed their temporary shelters by 31 October and moved to within the monastery camp; others are now temporarily sheltering at a school near this monastery. The camp is extremely crowded; most IDPs live in open spaces in the monastery, such as the main religious meeting hall, which poses particular challenges for women and girls.⁴

Military council is forcing war refugees to return home under threat of arrest, Western News, 25 October 2022: https://www.facebook.com/westernnewsagency/posts/pfbid0xjfVpchB4fh4P3tcHxwuyvx6sLm1niNsx94QRq9YmsvLSTUGyst3nfrncK1gJcczl [Burmese language].

Interview on file, female, 25, Rakhine State, November 2022.

Interview on file, female, 25, Rakhine State, November 2022.

Interview on file, female, 25, Rakhine State, November 2022

According to the IDP who spoke to this analytical unit, IDPs there have not received support from any actor — the SAC, local responders, or international agencies — in three months.⁵ Rice stores which had been collected previously are nearly depleted, raising concerns about food security. IDPs reported needing temporary shelters, especially to provide safe spaces for women and girls, as well as toilets and hygiene or dignity kits.⁶

Kyauktaw Township

The SAC township GAD officer instructed IDPs in the Kan Sauk IDP camp, via the village tract clerk from Kan Sauk village, to return to their villages of origin before the end of October. The source who spoke to this analytical unit said that IDPs feel this is not possible due to the ongoing and escalating armed violence between the AA and the SAC; with no better options, IDPs feel they must stay and risk arrest. The Kan Sauk IDP camp hosts around 220 IDPs from 57 households, most of whom were displaced from Tha Lu Chaung village tract in 2018, including from the villages of Kha Maung Khaing, Ah Htet Lay Pway, Kha Maung and Auk Lay Pway.

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The SAC village tract clerk reportedly told IDPs that the order came from as high as the Nay Pyi Taw level, and asked them to provide a list of those IDPs who had returned home, to whom the SAC would provide rice, clothing, other essentials, and 100,000 Myanmar Kyat (USD ~48) per household on a monthly basis.⁹

An IDP who spoke to this analytical unit reported that they submitted a letter to the village tract clerk, informing him that the IDPs will not return to their areas of origin. According to the IDP interviewed by this analytical unit, if the SAC demolishes the current camp, IDPs plan to move to other nearby villages. The source reported that, although WFP provided a cash distribution in recent weeks, IDPs continue to face difficulty accessing medical services and food. In

Mrauk-U Township

In early and mid October, staff from the SAC township GAD office came to the Tin Nyo IDP camp and instructed residents to return to their areas of origin. ¹² According to an IDP who spoke to this analytical unit, the SAC has made this request four times since the coup. The camp hosts an estimated 2,271 IDPs, from 698 households, who have been been sheltering there since early 2019; most came from nearby areas in Mrauk-U Township, including Ma Kyar Se, Let Kar, Aung Thar Kyan, Hpa Yar Gyi and Na Pu Kan and Wai Thar Li villages. ¹³

The source who spoke to this analytical unit said that IDPs cannot yet return home, due to ongoing and escalating armed violence between the AA and the SAC, explosive contamination, and the lack of livelihoods in areas of origin. He also reported concerns of food shortages in the camp, and added that the only assistance IDPs occasionally receive comes from local parahita groups. Local CSOs are reportedly largely unable to reach the camp due to SAC travel restrictions. Despite inquiries from IDPs, the SAC has yet to share any plans to support returning IDPs, such as through the provision of food supplies, livelihood support, and clearance of explosive ordnance. 15

Interview on file, female, 25, Rakhine State, November 2022.

⁶ Interview on file, female, 25, Rakhine State, November 2022.

As fighting intensified in Rakhine, the SAC is forcing IDPs from three Kyauktaw camps to return to home, Narinjara, 20 September 2022: https://www.facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/pfbid02ao3AXhsHLnYq8tKRgobsKaT7A1ULvgnqbrxVifRsKWea86z2LeRvmyNvv7C1ayS6I [Burmese language].

⁸ Interview on file male 35 Bakhine State November 2022

⁹ Interview on file, male, 35, Rakhine State, November 2022.

¹⁰ Interview on file, male, 35, Rakhine State, November 2022

 $^{^{\}mbox{\scriptsize 11}}$ $\,$ Interview on file, male, 35, Rakhine State, November 2022.

¹² Interview on file, male, 42, Rakhine State, November 2022.

Interview on file, male, 42, Rakhine State, November 2022.
Interview on file, male, 42, Rakhine State, November 2022,

Interview on file, male, 42, Rakhine State, November 2022.

Southern Chin State

Paletwa Township

In early October, the SAC summoned the leaders from IDP camps in urban Paletwa Township and informed them that IDPs must return to their area of origin by the end of that month. In the meeting, the SAC township officer said that all SAC-provided food support would stop at the end of October; as of 7 November, the IDPs have not received further assistance. According to one source who spoke to this analytical unit, the SAC had provided rice on a weekly basis — but IDPs suspect that this rice was supplied by an international agency. In the middle of October, township GAD staff visited the camps and informed them that they must return home by the end of the year, rather than the end of the month. Is

One of these camps, the Sit Hpyo Yae IDP camp, hosts an estimated 400 IDPs from 130 households who were displaced from several villages, including Kyauk Phyar, Taung Ma Wa, Na Ma Da, Tha Htay Kone, and Ah Baung Thar. A source from this camp told this analytical unit that IDPs there do not have any plans to return to their villages due to the current fighting between the SAC and the AA near their areas of origin, and the presence of SAC troops or installations nearby.¹⁹ IDPs reportedly have no plans for relocation of any kind; while they are concerned that they could face arrest, they reportedly feel that they have no alternative available to them. IDPs reported facing a shortage of food supplies due to a general lack of assistance from international agencies and local aid groups amid stringent SAC access and transportation restrictions, and they reported that even low quality rice has become expensive.20

Shan State

Kutkai Township

In Kutkai Township, the four IDP camps around Mai Yu Lay village had already resettled in villages, some as long ago as 2017. Despite the fact that these camps were no longer open, SAC officials ordered two of the "camps" — Mai Yu Lay (Old) camp and Mai Yu Lay New (Ta'ang) — to close. ²¹ The GAD apparently called the two camps' leaders and explained to them that the SAC plans to close all IDP camps across Myanmar. The IDPs requested to stay in the villages, but they have received no response. ²²

A camp leader from Mai Yu Lay (Old) camp told this analytical unit that the two other former camps around Mai Yu Lay village, the Ho Hku and Pan Law (Lisu) camps, may not have received orders because they did not register as IDP sites when they formed.23 A leader of the Ho Hku camp told this analytical unit that its residents had lived in the Mai Yu Lay New (Ta'ang) camp for one year before resettling into Ho Hku village in 2017 under an agreement with the village leader; these 134 people have not received any instruction to move again, but they reported that humanitarian assistance has decreased.²⁴ All four of the former IDP camps around Mai Yu Lay village still receive some assistance from INGOs/NGOs, including hygiene kits, school kits, nutrition support for pregnant women, and vocational training;25 but they are in need of food, shelter, health services, clean water, and electricity. According to reports from a former IDP camp leader, forced recruitment by Ethnic Armed Organisations and movement of armed actors in and around the former camps continue to cause security concerns.26

Chin State Military Council issued a letter ordering refugees in Paletwa to return home by October, Narinjara, 3 October 2022: https://www.facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/pfbid02D8U1yotRXB6R2ntKpztMWKbEtQvHcSMyg1u81mgMXznyVX75mRo9zg7CUXghconKI [Burmese language].

¹⁷ Interview on file, 42, male, Chin State, November 2022.

¹⁸ Interview on file, 42, male, Chin State, November 2022.

¹⁹ Interview on file, 42, male, Chin State, November 2022.

Interview on file, 42, male, Chin State, November 2022.

²¹ Interview on file, male, 53, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

²² Interview on file, male, 53, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

²³ Interview on file, male, 53, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

²⁴ Interview on file, female, 39, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

²⁵ Interview on file, male, 53, Northern Shan State, November 2022, Interview on file, female, 39, Northern Shan State, November 2022

Interview on file, male, 53, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

On 6 November, Shwepheemyay News reported that the SAC would close the five most populated IDP camps in Kutkai Township and turn them into villages. In addition Mai Yu Lay (Old) camp and Mai Yu Lay New (Ta'ang), which had already resettled themselves as described above, this included the Zup Aung camp, New Pang Ku camp, and Galeng (Palung) camp.²⁷ According to local media, the Bang Yang Hka (Mung Ji Pa) camp has not yet received camp closure orders.²⁸

Namtu Township

Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) Camp

On 20 October, UNOCHA and the SAC Minister of Shan State reportedly visited jointly to evaluate the status of the relocation of a camp run by the KBC in Namtu Township. During this visit, the SAC minister reportedly told IDPs that the SAC would announce a policy to close all IDP camps nationwide on 11 November.²⁹

An IDP reported to this analytical unit that the GAD instructed that signs for the KBC IDP camp be removed this month, and that relocation must be completed by April 2023.³⁰ The camp hosts around 127 IDPs from 30 households, all of whom remain at the site but have reportedly begun the process of deconstructing buildings. According to a source who spoke to this analytical unit, the IDPs do not have enough money to purchase construction materials for new shelters, and plan to stay in temporary tarpaulin tents on the plots they have purchased while waiting for assistance.³¹ At the relocation site, IDPs need support with transportation, construction materials and fees, WASH, and electricity. IDPs also reported hearing that they would lose WFP assistance in December 2022.³²

Kyu Saw Camp

The SAC reportedly informed residents of the Kyu Saw camp that the camp must close by the end of October, and that IDPs should prepare for departure by 15 October. A source who spoke to this analytical unit said that in the first week of November, a GAD officer then called the camp leader and informed him that IDPs will be allowed to stay in the camp till they are ready to resettle — as long as this doesn't take too long.³³

This camp hosted 271 ethnic Shan IDPs from 60 households, originally from eight villages in Manton Township and one village in Namtu Township. According to the camp clerk, who spoke to this analytical unit, 25 of these households left the camp in late October. 4 Of these households, those with children enrolled in school rented apartments around Namtu Town while others returned to areas of origin. The remaining 35 households apparently remain in the camp because they are busy harvesting crops, and have no time at present for the tasks involved in the return process such as arranging transportation and collecting materials with which to build new shelters. Apparently, these 35 households are planning to return to their areas of origin in the upcoming dry season (March-May). 35

According to the camp clerk, the IDPs remaining in the camp continue to receive some support from WFP, IRC, and local responders. Additionally, KMSS has apparently offered support to the IDPs who will return to their areas of origin, including construction materials and hygiene kits. Additionally, the GAD has reportedly offered to pay 100,000 Myanmar Kyat (USD ~48) to each household that returns. ³⁶ A source in the camp reported that NGOs have said they will not be able to provide support beyond the closure of the camps, but would support village development projects in the near future. ³⁷ At present, there are no education or health-care facilities near the IDPs' areas of origin.

⁷ SAC converts IDP camps to villages, Shwe Phee Myay News Agency, 5 November 2022: https://www.facebook.com/100068918215879/posts/pfbid0P1iCMbkW87HyS99H6CFiaXd8joRTmE517j3F6cTtaEk71RWCM2qdkXouGuJzpKLaI/ [Burmese language].

IDPs concerned about renewed fighting as troops stay in camp, Shwe Phee Myay News Agency, 16 July 2022: https://www.facebook.com/shwepheemyaynews/posts/pfbid02qmuvgtu7cL5haV8UyufHYBN286jDjsxeVcAHwM6Xpz1JKetVJ45W7kmqQhgk19GRI [Burmese language].

²⁹ Interview on file, male, 53, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

 $^{^{\}mbox{\tiny 30}}$ $\,$ Interview on file, female, 41, Northern Shan State, November 2022

Interview on file, female, 41, Northern Shan State, November 2022

Interview on file, female, 41, Northern Shan State, November 2022

³³ Interview on file, female, 27, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

³⁴ Interview on file, female, 27, Northern Shan State, November 2022

³⁵ Interview on file, female, 27, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

³⁶ Interview on file, female, 27, Northern Shan State, November 2022

³⁷ Interview on file, female, 27, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

Lisu Camp

In compliance with GAD instructions, the Lisu camp was abolished permanently on 28 October; all structures at the site have been demolished.³⁸ The camp previously hosted around 101 IDPs from 24 households. Those who were able to buy land around the town are building new houses with wood and bamboo and already living there, while those who cannot buy land are now renting apartments in Namtu Town.39 According to one IDP there, the GAD officer said that the SAC Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement would provide 100,000 Myanmar Kyat (USD ~48) to each household when they relocated, but IDPs have not yet received this assistance. The former IDPs report that they have continued to receive rice from WFP and health services from IRC. A camp leader said UNHCR was planning to provide corrugated iron sheets, for roofing, to all households in December.⁴⁰ According to a woman who spoke to this analytical unit, IDPs need additional assistance, including support for shelter, electricity, and hygiene kits.⁴¹

Namkham Township

Two IDPs camps in Namkham Township, the KBC (Jaw Wang) camp and Nay Win Ni camp, received instructions from the GAD that the camps must permanently close and occupants must return to their areas of origin by the end of October.⁴² The KBC (Jaw Wang) camp hosts around 328 Kachin IDPs, while the Nay Win Ni camp hosts around 402 Ta'ang IDPs.⁴³ A CSO worker in Northern Shan State told this analytical unit that the residents of the Ta'ang-populated Nay Win Ni camp have neither voiced concerns about the camp closure orders nor made plans to relocate.⁴⁴

In late September, the IDPs from the KBC (Jaw Wang) camp in Namkham informed the GAD that it is not possible to return to their villages of origin at this time because of the difficulty of travel during monsoon season, academic delays for children, and the risks posed by landmine and explosive contamination. ⁴⁵ They requested permission to stay in the camps until the end of the academic year (March-April). Around the second week of October, the GAD responded that the IDPs could stay until April 2023, but must use the interim time to prepare everything they need to fully relocate within six months. ⁴⁶ IDPs also requested assistance from humanitarian actors for their relocation process, but those who spoke to this analytical unit said that they had not yet received a response. ⁴⁷

Most of the IDPs living in the KBC (Jaw Wang) camp were displaced from Mansi Township, Kachin State, in 2011. Not only does the poor infrastructure in the area make it nearly impossible to return home during the monsoon season, but villages of origin have been completely overtaken by plants and wildlife in the intervening 11 years; according to IDPs, all of the houses in areas of origin have collapsed.⁴⁸ However, they have decided that due to the closure orders they must proceed with their relocation between February and April 2023, with or without the support of agencies.

Some INGOs/ NGOs still provide vocational training, health services, nutrition support for pregnant women, and cash assistance. Before the coup, the GAD provided rice, oil, and chickpeas every three months in both camps. An IDP told this analytical unit that assistance has decreased since last year in both camps, and that difficulty finding livelihoods has often pushed youth, including teenagers, to travel to border areas in search of day labour.⁴⁹

Interview on file, female, 44, Namtu Town, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

³⁹ Interview on file, female, 44, Namtu Town, Northern Shan State, November 2022.

Interview on file, female, 44, Namtu Town, Northern Shan State, November 2022

Interview on file, female, 44, Namtu Town, Northern Shan State, November 2022

⁴² Situation Update: Camp Closure Crisis, October 2022

Interview on file, female, 41, Namkham Township, November 2022.

⁴⁴ Interview on file, female, 26, Northern Shan State, October 2022

⁴⁵ Situation Update: Camp Closure Crisis, October 2022; IDPs in Namkham have difficulty returning home, Shwe Phee Myay News Agency, 26 September 2022; https://www.facebook.com/shwepheemyaynews/posts/pfbid021JWpYCvHZ5g5JtvdScKV2XNi98asfREBwsvoThwBvMaCtc2aXbc5c8kqDR92Xi3b1 [Burmese language]; IDPs in Namtu and Namkham not ready to return home, Shwe Phee Myay News Agency, 18 October 2022; https://www.facebook.com/shwepheemyaynews/posts/pfbid0FcJ3zXwAaXkjn6BCinGXGWY7QKJzDQhtLg4iunM63ANmfcpnxAxsS9p1YCKimCXLI [Burmese language];

Interview on file, female, 41, Namkham Township, November 2022

⁴⁷ Interview on file, female, 44, Namtu Town, November 2022.

Interview on file, female, 41, Namkham Township, November 2022

Interview on file, female, 41, Namkham Township.

Muse Township

In early September, a GAD officer reportedly called the IDP Committee Chairman and ordered him to close all the camps in Monekoe Town.⁵⁰ However, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army troops have set up military camps in IDPs' places of origin, and have not allowed them to return.

In and around Monekoe Town, four camps host around 750 IDPs from 201 households. Most of these IDPs are Ta'ang, but a minority are Kachin or Han Chinese. These IDPs' displacement began in September 2021, and they have reportedly not received any assistance from local or international organisations due to SAC restrictions. However, some have reportedly received a small amount of cash assistance — around 35,000 Myanmar Kyat (USD ~17) — from a local CSO.⁵¹

The camp leader reportedly asked the GAD to allocate land for IDPs to settle, but the GAD reportedly refused. 52 The IDP committee then negotiated with local landowners to purchase land at 5,500 Chinese Yuan (USD ~765) per plot, which is approximately 50 square feet per household. 53

In late October, the GAD officer came to the camp and instructed them again to leave; he asked them to move to a suitable place if they could not return home. Twenty IDPs owned farms near Monekoe Town where they can go, and the remainder have arranged to buy land on instalment plans and begun construction of shelters.⁵⁴ They need construction materials for shelters, food, and other basic commodities to support their relocation.⁵⁵

Hseni Township

According to a leader of the Nam Sa Lap camps, which include a KBC camp and the Tsan Lun camp, the GAD ordered the camps to close in late September; however, most of the residents had already resettled before the coup, with the IDPs having moved into nearby villages.⁵⁶

The Nam Sa Lap camps hosted around 200 Kachin IDPs of 54 households, who had been displaced in 2017 from the border area of Hseni and Kutkai Townships. Only those who had been unable to purchase land remained in displacement sites. After the camp closure order, these remaining IDPs asked and received permission from the village leader to stay permanently in or near the village. Now, all IDPs have reportedly fully resettled into a vacant area elsewhere in Sa Lap village tract. The Most struggle with livelihoods, in part because there is no land available for agriculture. Food support has been reduced—reportedly due to the IDPs' resettled status—but some responders continue to provide some vocational training and microfinance.

Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 35 Muse Township

⁵¹ Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 35 Muse Township

⁵² Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 35 Muse Township

⁵³ Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 35 Muse Township.

⁵⁴ Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 35 Muse Township.

³⁰⁰ IDPs need help, Shwe Phee Myay News Agency, 25 October 2022: https://www.facebook.com/shwepheemyaynews/posts/pfbid0PLpac86fEQAQ2adSASxaYR9FhazRLsKbHCpzSxjz1GrKsDnACF138zzyxXgz9xSkl [Burmese language]

⁵⁶ Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 75, Hseni Township.

Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 75, Hseni Township

Interview on file, November 2022, Male, 75, Hseni Township.

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