

# Rohingya villages a battleground for military clashes

## Clashes lead to civilian casualties in Buthidaung township

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 16 January 2023

### Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:** Gu Dar Pyin village area (ဂူဒါပြင်), Buthidaung township (ဘူးသီးတောင်မြို့နယ်), Rakhine state (ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်) [20.753842, 92.5451042].
- **Date/Time of Incident:**
  - Multiple events between 25 September 2022 and 28 October 2022
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**
  - Arakan Army (AA)
  - State Administration Council (SAC)
- **Conclusions:**
  - Active fighting has occurred across Rohingya villages in the Gu Dar Pyin village area (ဂူဒါပြင်).
  - User-generated content (UGC) showing the fighting was analysed by Myanmar Witness.
  - Seven civilians were allegedly wounded, of which five were visible within the analysed UGC.
  - One civilian was allegedly killed. The deceased civilian was visible within the UGC analysed by Myanmar Witness.

### Summary

In Rakhine state, clashes between armed forces have occurred in and around Buthidaung township, involving the Arakan Army (AA) and the State Administration Council (SAC). Across September and October, multiple claims of both combatant and civilian casualties were identified, alongside allegations of rape and other potential violations of international law. UGC showing the wounded and dead has been verified by Myanmar Witness.

### Myanmar Witness has been able to verify:

- The occurrence of fighting and explosions in Gu Dar Pyin between 25 September 2022 and 5 October 2022, verified through an analysis of UGC uploaded to social media, and satellite imagery.

- Footage showing injured or killed civilians in Buthidaung township. Five of the seven allegedly injured and the one killed civilian are visible in the footage.

## Background

Rakhine state has been the site of multiple tragedies in recent years, including the state riots between ethnic Rakhines and the Rohingya in 2012, and the Rohingya massacre in 2017.

Common power outages have caused the state to be relatively low on outgoing information and/or UGC. Despite this, in recent months the escalation of fighting between the Arakan Army (AA) and the State Administration Council (SAC) has led to increased attention on the region.

The Arakan army was founded alongside the United League of Arakan (ULA) as a mostly Buddhist membership group. They have been in conflict with the SAC since 2011. Its main goals are for self-determination for the multi-ethnic Arakanese population, and the restoration of Arakan's lost sovereignty.

Since late November 2022, the AA and the SAC have held a [largely maintained ceasefire agreement](#).

# Map of Buthidaung locations identified as sites of conflict

Gu Dar Pyin (Gudam Fara)	ဂူဒါပြင်	20.7533702	92.5451889
Thayet Taung	သရက်တောင်	20.7615299	92.5440826
Kyauk Sar Taing (Su see)	ကျောက်စာတိုင် (စုစည်း)	20.7494297	92.5286483
Hpoè Khaung Chaung	ဖိုးခေါင်ချောင်း	20.7396297	92.5642395

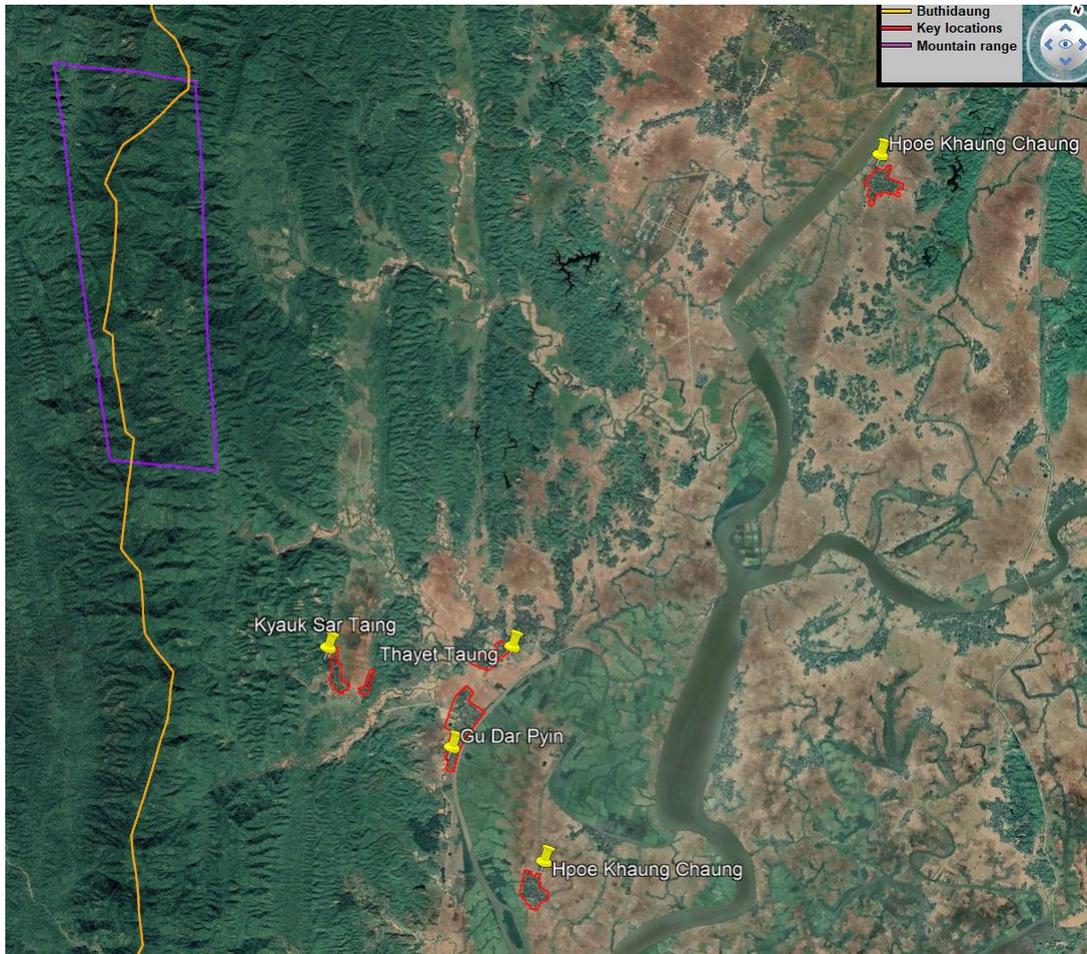


Figure 1: Map of locations identified as sites of conflict. Note: The purple box refers to an often used point of reference throughout the geolocation within this report.

## Timeline investigation

While conducting this investigation, Myanmar Witness identified disparate pieces of UGC and various allegations and claims, largely in reference to conflict in Buthidaung township. Through the processes of geolocation and chronolocation, Myanmar Witness has been able to build up a picture of the events which took place in Buthidaung township from September to October 2022. Fact-based assertions can be made on the location and time that these pieces of content were captured. All imagery has been checked for originality (i.e. if the content has been posted before with a different narrative/time/location).

### 25 September 2022

Gu Dar Pyin (ဂုဒါပိုင်), Buthidaung

#### **Verified**

Gunfire reported by social media users in Gudam Fara and Thayet Taung. Gunshots can be heard in a [video](#) posted on social media, allegedly between the SAC in Thayet Taung and the AA in Gudam Fara. The following figures, taken from the video, show a mountainscape and radio towers which were geolocated, allowing Myanmar Witness to determine that the video was filmed at Hpoe Khaung Chaung. Another [video](#) shows a piece of metal stuck in a damaged tree. Whilst this video could not be geolocated, it has the same building type as Gu Dar Pyin.

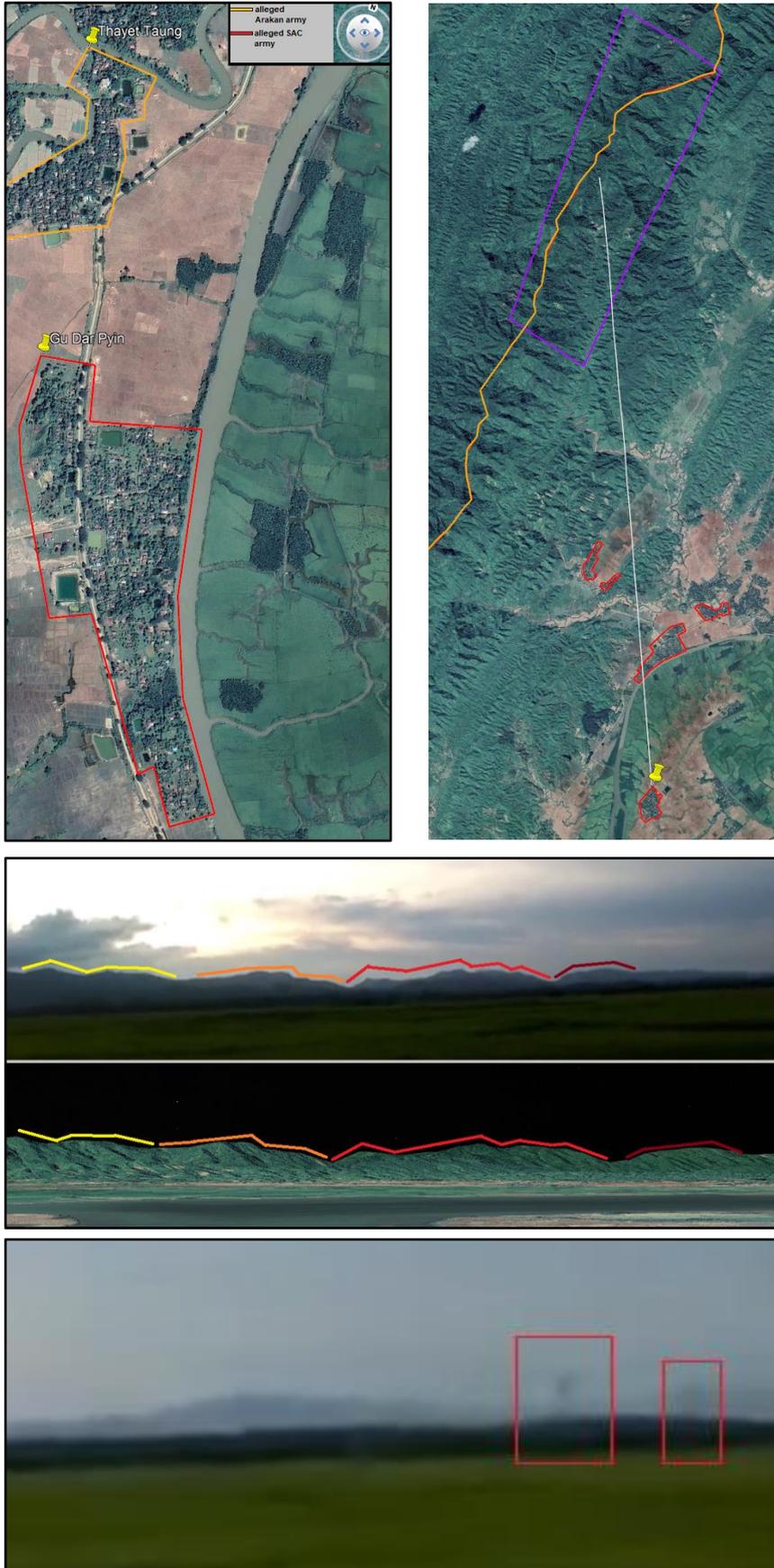


Figure 2: Geolocation of [UGC identified on social media](#). The mountainous background and 2 towers in the far right of the video gave useful reference points.

### Verified

Video footage emerged showing people fleeing from Gu Dar Pyin itself. Faint smoke clouds are visible in the direction of Gu Dar Pyin. This [footage](#) has been verified using the following visible identifiers: the direction of the roofs, the radio tower, and the electricity building.



Figure 3: Geolocation of [UGC sourced from social media](#). The people visible in the footage are moving away from Gu Dar Pyin.

## 1 October 2022

Pu Zun Chaung (ပုဇွန်ချောင်း), Buthidaung

### [Graphic or explicit content]

#### Partially Verified

On and after 1 October, [claims](#) of the rape of a Rohingya woman emerged from a Buthidaung village. A video of the victim speaking about the incident was released online (source redacted due to privacy concerns). Supposedly, it was perpetrated by multiple AA soldiers, who have already been punished after admitting their actions. They were reportedly whipped and have 20 years of incarceration. Information related to the confessions and punishment can be found [online](#) (warning graphic).

## 3 October 2022

Kyauk Sar Taing (ကျောက်စာတိုင်), Buthidaung

#### Unverified

[Reports](#) of fighting between the AA and SAC in Kyauk Sar Taing.

## 5 October 2022

Gu Dar Pyin (ဂူဒါပြင်), Buthidaung

### Verified

There were multiple [mentions](#) of [fighting](#) between the AA and the SAC in Gu Dar Pyin. Footage of fires was geolocated to the village. As with all mountainscape locations, finding the exact location where the picture was taken is often tricky, but it allows for the identification of the general area.

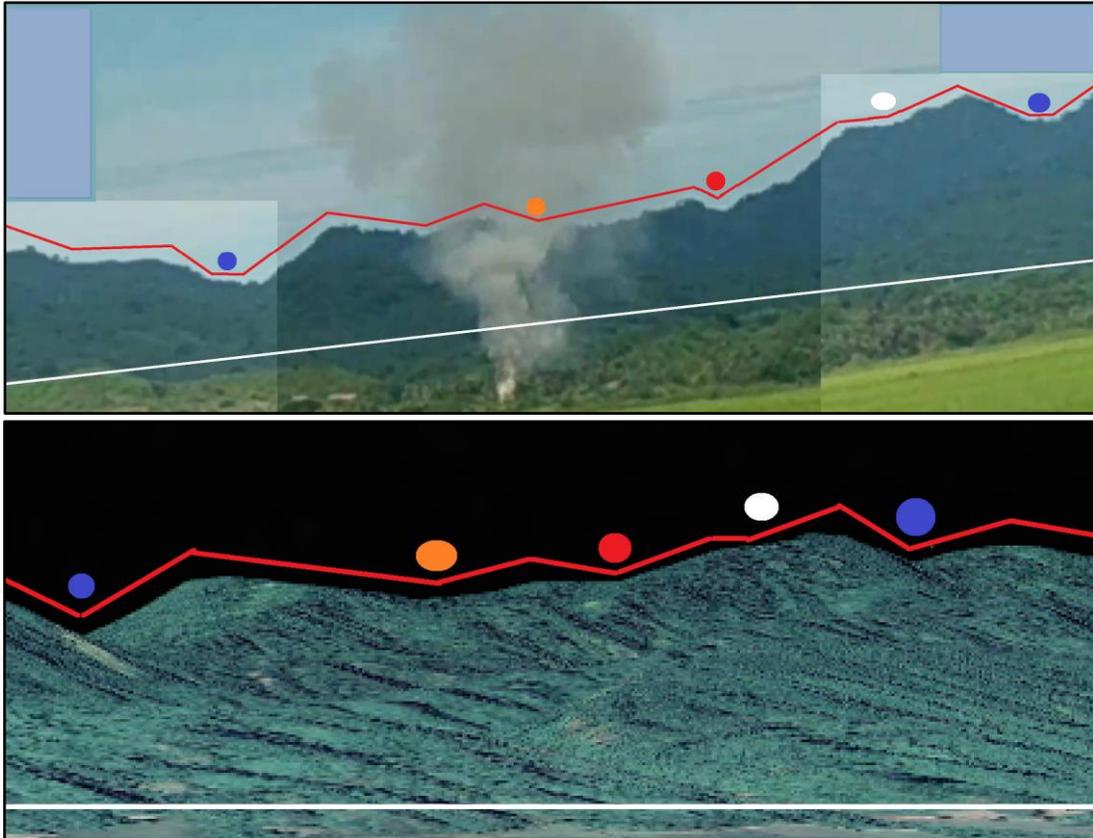


Figure 4: [Geolocation](#) of social media footage, again a part of the mountainscape seen on earlier geolocations.

## 6 October 2022

Gu Dar Pyin, Kyauk Sar Taing (ဂူဒါပြင်, ကျောက်စာတိုင်), Buthidaung

### Unverified

Continued [claims](#) of fighting between the towns of Gu Dar Pyin and Taung.

## 7 October 2022

Gu Dar Pyin (ဂူဒါပြင်), Buthidaung

### Unverified

Social media users reported that a landmine exploded in Gu Dar Pyin, injuring a Rohingya (source redacted due to privacy concerns).

## 8 October 2022

Gu Dar Pyin (ဂူဒါပြင်), Buthidaung

**[Graphic or explicit content]**

**Verified/partially verified/unverified**

Images of a deceased man, allegedly shot by the AA were shared on social media. Reports suggest that the victim was the uncle of a prominent Rohingya activist (two sources redacted due to privacy concerns).

## 13 October 2022

Kyaung Taung (ကျောင်းတောင်), Buthidaung

**[Graphic or explicit content]**

**partially verified**

Footage allegedly showing a member of the AA beating a Rohingya man (source redacted due to privacy concerns).

## 16 October 2022

Gu Dar Pyin (ဂူဒါပြင်), Kyauk Sar Taing (ကျောက်စာတိုင်), Buthidaung

**Unverified**

A social media user [claimed](#) that people were fleeing because of heavy weapon usage between the SAC and AA.

## 18 October 2022

Sung Nibhil (Rohingya place name), Buthidaung

**[Graphic or explicit content]**

**partially verified**

Imagery of an injured (supposedly Rohingya) man, who was allegedly hit by a heavy weapon (source redacted due to privacy concerns).

## 19 October 2022

U Hla Hpay (ဦးလှဖေ), Buthidaung

**[Graphic or explicit content]**

**Partially verified**

Images uploaded to social media of an injured/killed man (supposedly a Rohingya), who was allegedly shot by an unknown assailant (two sources redacted due to privacy concerns).

## 23 October 2022

Phoe Khaung Chaung (ဖိုးခေါင်ချောင်း), Buthidaung

### Unverified

[Reports](#) that shots were allegedly fired at an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) settlement in Hpoe Khaung Chaung.

## 27 October 2022

Phoe Khaung Chaung (ဖိုးခေါင်ချောင်း), Buthidaung

### Unverified

Claims circulated online that a Rohingya was allegedly hit by artillery (sources redacted due to privacy concerns).

## 29 October 2022

Gu Dar Pyin (ဂူဒါပြင်), Buthidaung

### [Graphic or explicit content]

#### partially verified

Graphic imagery of an injured man (supposedly a Rohingya) was posted on social media. The man was allegedly shot by the SAC (source redacted due to privacy concerns).

## Victims and Destruction

As this timeline of events in Buthidaung demonstrates, the clashes between the AA and SAC led to multiple injuries and the fatality of at least one Rohingya man. This included:

1. the death of a prominent Rohingya teacher;
2. the rape of a woman; and
3. six people were claimed to be injured, of which four were visible within UGC.

The smokestack visible on 5 October and destruction seen from 25 September can not be seen on FIRMS or sentinel, indicating that the fighting didn't lead to widespread fires. Despite this, the geolocated and verified imagery provided in the timeline does prove the existence of a fire/explosion in or near Gu Dar Pyin.

Additionally, the sound of gunshots on 25 September corroborates the claims of fighting in or near the town of Gu Dar Pyin.

## Future monitoring

The conflict between the AA and SAC continued to escalate until the ceasefire was agreed in November 2022. Prior to the agreement, Buthidaung township was the site of many attacks and retaliations from both sides, particularly since August 2022. Rakhine state will continue to

be monitored in an attempt to verify claims of attacks and conflict, especially those that impact local communities, including minorities such as the Rohingya.

## Abbreviations

Arakan Army	AA
Fire Information for Resource Management System	FIRMS
Internally Displaced Person	IDP
State Administrative Council	SAC
United League of Arakan	ALU
User-Generated Content	UGC