

Airstrike and massacre in Pinlaung

At least 20 dead, including monks, and civilian infrastructure destroyed by airstrikes and arson in Pinlaung Township

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 17 March 2023

Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:** Nam Neint village (နန်းနီမ့်), Pinlaung Township (ပင်လောင်း), Shan State (ရှမ်း) [19.900822, 96.836592].
- **Date/Time of Incident:** 11 March 2023
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and Involvement:**
 - Myanmar Military
 - Pa-O National Army (military-allied forces)
 - Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF)
 - People's Defence Forces (PDF)
- **Summary of Investigation:**
 - Pinlaung township has experienced a number of reported clashes taking place between the military, military-allied forces, and local defence forces in the area.
 - Eleven days before the incident at Nam Neint village, reports of an airstrike four kilometres away in Tawng Me Thin (တောင်မဲသင်း) village were verified by Myanmar Witness.
 - Myanmar Witness geolocated user-generated content (UGC) showing Nam Neint village on fire and identified FIRMS data that suggests this fire took place on 11 March 2023. This fire was seen burning between 0715 local time and 1045 local time.
 - Images of deceased individuals were geolocated by Myanmar Witness to Nam Neint village. The images indicate that the individuals had died very recently, and fires were captured still burning.
 - Although the capture date of the various pieces of UGC in this investigation cannot be verified, Myanmar Witness determined that the incident almost certainly took place on 11 March 2023, likely between 0715 and 0847 local time.
 - While the perpetrators cannot be conclusively identified, there is information to suggest that the Myanmar military were present in the area at the time.

Warning: This report contains graphic imagery.

Summary

On 27 February 2023 in Pinlaung Township, Southern Shan State, The Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) and the People's Defense Forces (PDF) attacked a Pa-O National Organization (PNO) checkpoint near the village of Tawng Me Thin village. At least 10 Myanmar military and PNO personnel were [reportedly](#) killed in this incident. The PNO is a military-aligned organisation, with an [armed wing](#): the Pa-O National Army (PNA). They have known ties to the [Union and Solidary Development Party \(USDP\)](#).

Due to the fighting in the region, many villagers from Tawng Me Thin and the surrounding villages were reportedly forced to [flee](#) to other villages in Pinlaung (ပင်လောင်း) and Naungtayar [sub-Township](#) (နောင်တရားမြို့နယ်ခွဲ).

On 28 February 2023, reports on social media claimed that Tawng Me Thin village was hit by an airstrike. Myanmar Witness identified footage showing a Myanmar Air Force (MAF) K-8 aircraft flying over Tawng Me Thin village. In the footage, the village appears to have been attacked with the aircraft; however, Myanmar Witness could not verify the date this incident took place.

On 11 March 2023, the Myanmar military allegedly raided Nam Neint village, burning homes and killing more than 20 residents - including at least three monks. Civilians allegedly hid inside the monastery compound while the military burned down homes.

Myanmar Witness has verified several images showing at least 22 separate deceased individuals in the monastery compound, as well as evidence of burnt homes. The images of bodies are time stamped to 11 March 2023, but could not be independently chronolocated. However, NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS) confirms the presence of fire in Nam Neint village on 11 March 2023. Using Suncalc, Myanmar Witness analysed some of the identified UGC and broadly chronolocated its origin to be between 0715 and 0847 local time.

Location

Pinlaung township in southern Shan State is located within the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, which is jointly controlled by PNO and the Myanmar military (Figure 1). The township is at the junction of Naypyidaw (နေပြည်တော်), Taunggyi (တောင်ကြီး), and Loikaw (လွိုင်ကော်).



Figure 1: Image demonstrating the three Pa-O self-administered zones in Southern Shan state (Source: [The Irrawaddy](#))

Between 24 February to 1 March 2023, clashes were [reported](#) between Myanmar military forces, their allies the PNA, and joint KNDF and PDF forces. A skirmish on 27 February 2023 [reportedly](#) left nine individuals from the Myanmar military and PNA joint forces dead. According to a [citizen](#) from Pinlaung township, this occurred when joint defence forces (KNDF and PDF) attacked a Myanmar military and PNA joint checkpoint on the road between Long Pyin (လုံပျဉ်) and Tawng Me Thin village.

An airstrike in Tawng me Thin village on 28 February (analysed within this report) led to the displacement of up to 6000 people from neighbouring villages. This was followed by ground attacks in Nam Neint village which left up to 22 people dead.

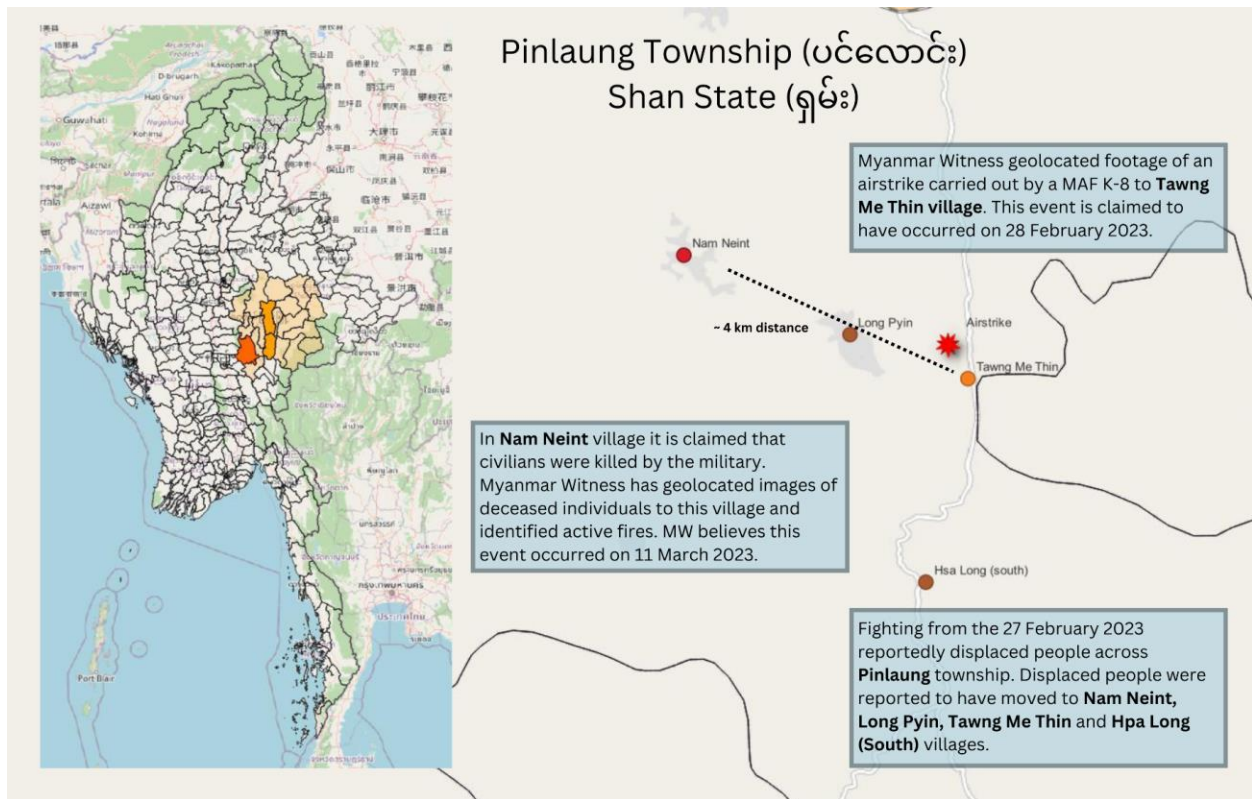


Figure 2: (Left) map of Southern Shan State with Pa-O Self Administration Zones highlighted and Pinlaung highlighted in a darker orange. (Right) Location map of the events covered in this report.

The investigation walkthrough [Warning: Graphic]

The Tawng me Thin village Airstrike - 28 February

On 28 February 2023, Tawng Me Thin village was allegedly attacked with an airstrike. Myanmar Witness was able to geolocate footage showing a MAF aircraft carrying out an airstrike in Tawng Me Thin village (Figure 3). In the footage, at the 0.06 second mark, a fighter jet identified by Myanmar Witness as a K-8, passes over the village and drops ordinance at around 19.888637, 96.872788. This immediately causes a flash and smoke to rise from the affected area (Figure 4).



Figure 3: (Left) MFA K-8 - circled in red - is seen carrying out an airstrike on Tawng Me Thin village. (Right) Geolocation of the UGC to Tawng Me Thin village on Google Earth (source: redacted due to privacy concerns).



Figure 4: Still frames taken from the 0.06 second mark (left) and 0.10 second mark (right) respectively, showing before and after the aircraft dropped ordnance on the village. The second image shows a significant amount of smoke rising from two areas in the village (source: redacted due to privacy concerns).

Analysis of additional UGC indicates that the airstrike impacted civilian infrastructure (Figure 5). The K-8 makes three passes over the area, two with strafing: an air attack tactic where a low flying aircraft repeatedly attacks with bombs or machine-gun fire. Strafing is often used in targeted attacks as it allows the pilot to scout the area prior to releasing additional ordnance. This could imply that Tawng Me Thin village was the target of an intentional attack.

Myanmar Witness was able to confirm the K8's employment of the strafing tactic by analysing the footage audio, in which the sound of sustained, automatic gunfire can be heard. As anti-aircraft fire could have originated from the ground and been directed at the K-8, causing the sound, additional scrutiny was required to confirm strafing. An attentive visual analysis of the first pass, however, reveals the appearance of small white plumes of smoke trailing behind the passing K-8's fuselage which are consistent with the employment of the [23mm cannon](#) mounted in a pod attached to the K8's underbelly.

In the last recorded pass, the K-8 releases what Myanmar Witness believes to be two free-fall unguided bombs which the K-8 usually carries on two of its four under-wing hardpoints. The angle of attack – which the jet assumes to guide the ordnance to target – and the lack of smoke coming from the falling bombs, provides further confirmation of the type of armament used. Myanmar

Witness is unable to assess the calibre of the two air-dropped munitions. Myanmar Witness could not chronolocate either piece of UGC.



Figure 5: The airstrike hit in an area containing many civilian structures (source: redacted due to privacy concerns).

Due to this fighting, around [5,000](#) people from Long Pyin (လုံးပျဉ်), Tawng Me Thin (တောင်မဲသင်း), Nam Neint (နန်းနိမ်), and Hsa Long South (ဆလုံ တောင်) reportedly fled; they are said to have been [sheltering](#) in monasteries and refugee camps. [Mizzima](#) reported that more than 6,000 local residents total had to flee due to the fighting. Approximately 1,000 residents of Nam Neint village alone fled and were [reportedly](#) taking refuge elsewhere.

The Nam Neint village attack - 11 March

On the morning of 11 March 2023, Myanmar military forces [allegedly](#) entered the nearby village of Nam Neint while monks and residents were inside a monastery compound. It is alleged that the village of Nam Neint was attacked by Myanmar military forces, culminating in the burning of civilian infrastructure and killing of several individuals, including civilians. Myanmar Witness has verified several factors relating to this case, including victims in the location of conflict, the burning of civilian infrastructure and potential perpetrators of the incident.

Myanmar Witness has verified the deaths of at least 22 people in Nam Neint, including three monks and a woman. It is alleged that the military also set fire to citizens homes, which Myanmar Witness has verified with geolocation and [FIRMS](#) data in Nam Neint village on 11 March 2023.

Arson

Myanmar Witness verified the location of footage showing significant fire damage to Nam Neint village (Figure 6 and 7). Using drone footage, Myanmar Witness has calculated that approximately 103 structures were damaged during this attack (Figure 8). [FIRMS](#) also recorded a fire in the village on 11 March 2023, corroborating claims from local media.

The UGC analysed by Myanmar Witness signals that the fire damage was caused by multiple individually set fires, instead of a single source. There is variation in the level of damage throughout the village; some houses remain unscathed, while others are totally destroyed. The gaps between areas damaged by fire also indicate that this was multiple fires, as fires are recorded in locations which could not be reached by a single fire (Figure 8). This supports a notion that the fires were set deliberately.



Figure 6: Drone footage showing burn damage to Nam Neint village (Source: [BBC Burmese](#)).



Figure 7: Drone footage from Nam Neint village, likely from 11 March 2023 (Source: [BBC Burmese](#)).

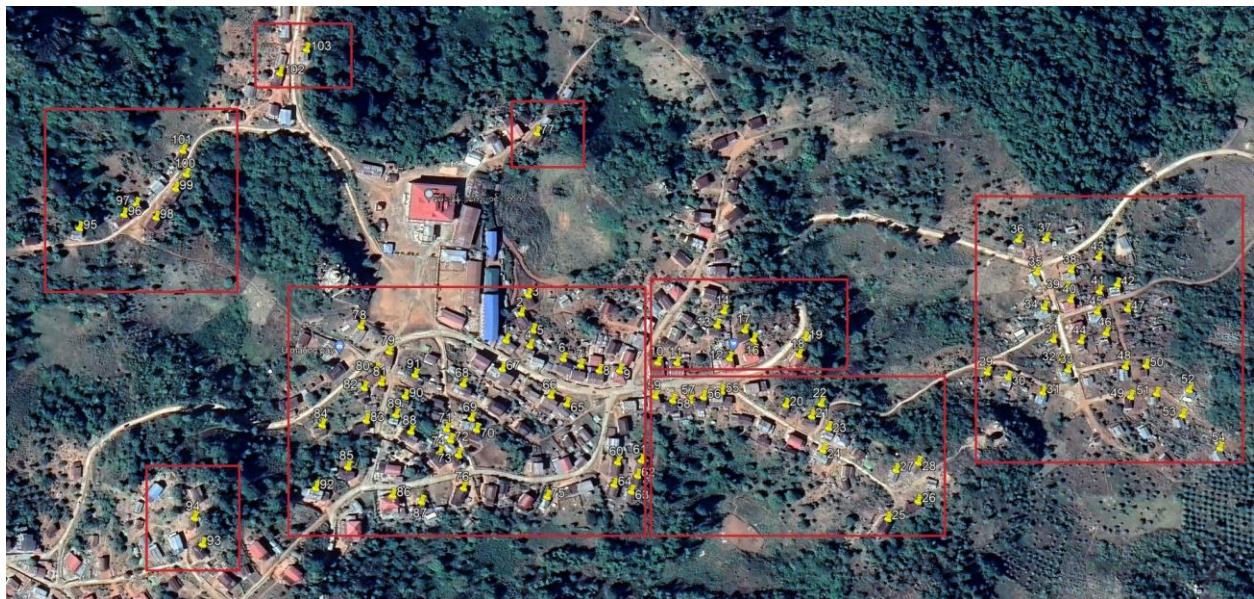


Figure 8: Following an analysis of the drone footage Myanmar Witness counts at least 103 homes that were affected by fire - highlighted here with google pins. The red boxes demonstrate the different areas of fire in the village, of which some are separated by areas where structures remain undamaged. This map uses Google Earth Satellite Imagery.

The location of the killings

Myanmar Witness has identified several graphic images, uploaded by a pro-military Telegram channel (source redacted due to privacy reasons) showing the remains of both armed and unarmed individuals who appear to have been shot and killed in Nam Neint village. Myanmar Witness geolocated the images to Nam Neint village (Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9: Geolocation of images of bodies in proximity to the monastery compound of Nam Neint village at around 19.900750, 96.835194 on Satellites Pro Imagery (Source: Private).



Figure 10: Geolocation of bodies to an area of which suffered significant burn damage in Nam Neint village at around 19.900735, 96.835211 (Sources: Private; [BBC Burmese](#)).

Myanmar Witness’ geolocated the deceased individuals to within the village monastery compound, which aligns with claims by [Local defence forces](#), who reported that the deceased individuals were local residents hiding in Nam Neint village monastery.

An analysis of the images, including the blood colouration and injuries, reveals that they were likely taken shortly after the individuals were killed (Figure 11). Additionally, a raging fire can be seen in the background of Figure 12. This means that the deaths took place either before or during the time when the fires were raging.



Figure 11: Blood in the photos uploaded by the pro-military channel first shows what appears to be fresh blood next to the bodies. The images have a circular watermark (Source: Private).



Figure 12: The photo date is time stamped and dated 0851 local time on 11 March 2023. Burning houses can be seen in the background. The text in the image reads “giving a lesson to Kayah PDF”. The image has a circular watermark (Source: Private).

Analysis of photos uploaded by KNDF forces indicate that they appear to have been taken later, as shown by the dry blood surrounding the deceased individuals (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Photos uploaded by the KNDF shows the dried blood next to the bodies (Source: [KNDF](#)).

Date and time of the incident

Myanmar Witness can confirm the date the events took place as [FIRMS](#) data identified fires in the area. Additionally, no earlier footage related to these events has been found online.

Myanmar Witness cannot directly confirm the exact time that the incident took place; however, it is likely to have occurred between 0715 and 0847 local time on 11 March 2023. To work out this timeframe of events, Myanmar Witness used a number of the graphic images taken from social media, drone footage of the area while the fires were active and analysed them through [Suncalc](#).

Myanmar Witness narrowed down the time of the incident using images of one of the victims (Figure 14). Figure 15 was likely taken sometime after 0715 local time as drone footage taken around 0715 (time determined using Suncalc) does not show the body and fires can be seen burning nearby (Figure 15 and 16). Drone footage taken around 1045 local time (time determined using Suncalc) shows the body in front of the monastery and the fires are no longer burning (Figure 17 and 18). Thus, the body appeared in front of the monastery between 0715 and 1045.



Figure 14: An image of one of the victims, outside of the monastery in Nam Neint village (Source: [Burma VJ](#)).



Figure 15: In the drone footage the body cannot be seen. Fires are active in the village and thus it is likely this drone footage was taken before the killing took place (Source: [BBC News Burmese](#)).



Figure 16: Chronolocation using [SunCalc](#) before the individual was killed, taken after 0715 local time.



Figure 17: Drone footage of the body outside the monastery building. (Source: Private).

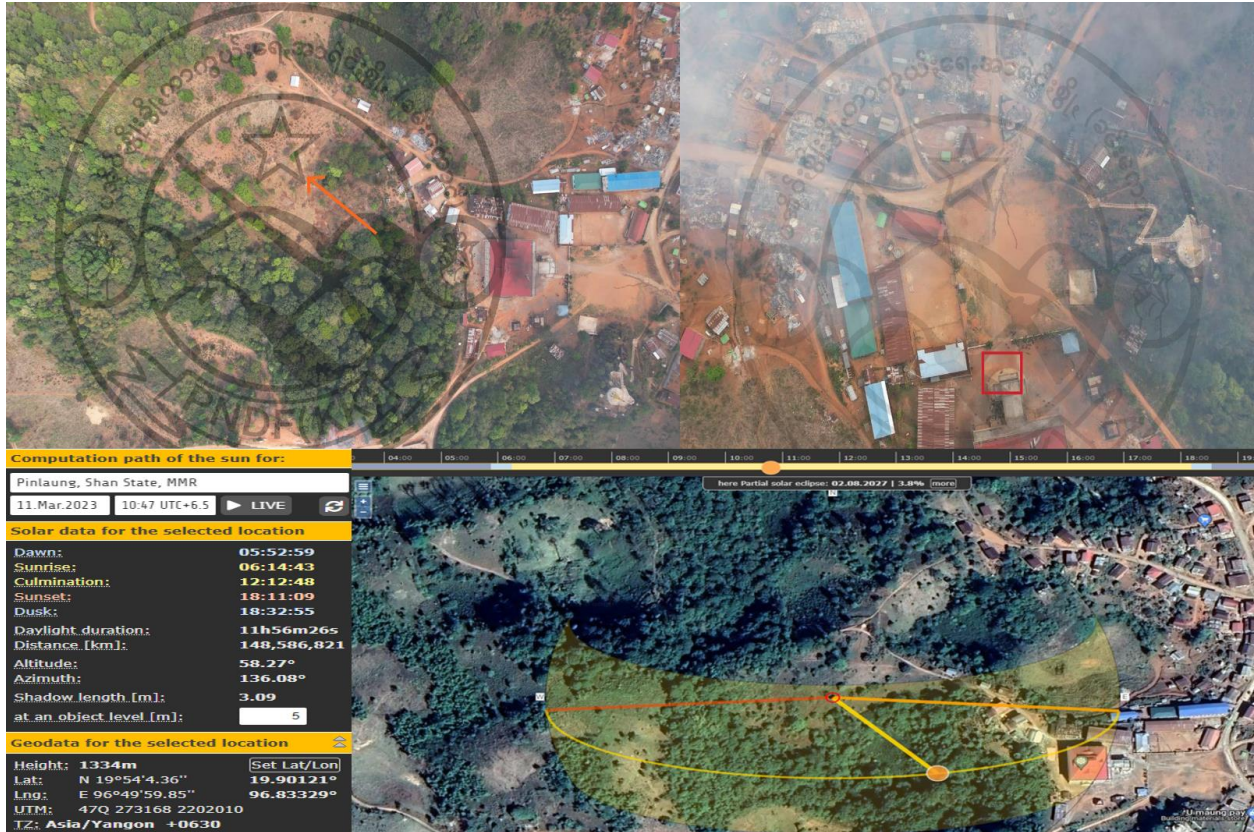


Figure 18: Chronolocation using [SunCalc](#) that suggests the body was there before 1045 local time.

Myanmar Witness was able to narrow down the timeframe further by assessing other images. For example, one image timestamped at 0847 local time on 11 March 2023, was analysed by Myanmar Witness. The shadow calculation for the image indicates that it was approximately 0845 local time (Figure 19 and 20).



Figure 19: The orange box highlighted timestamps the image at 0847 on 11 March 2023. The shadow in the background was utilised by Myanmar Witness to confirm the chronolocation. (Source: Private).



Figure 20: [Suncalc](#) demonstrates that the shadows in the image were likely made sometime very close to 0845 local time.

By bringing together the footage and the chronolocations carried out by Myanmar Witness, it can be concluded the killing of these individuals likely took place sometime between 0715 and 0845 local time on 11 March 2023.

Deceased Individuals

There are a total of at least 22 different individuals identified in images analysed by Myanmar Witness (Figure 21). Three of the deceased appear to be monks and there is at least one female among the deceased (Figure 22 and 23). All of these photos were geolocated directly to the village and some were pictured in images with the bodies of individuals from other images. This confirms they are all images taken from the same incident.



Figure 21: There are at least 22 individuals in the images including three who are dressed as monks and one female victim (Source: Private).



Figure 22: Images of monks who were killed in the incident. There are at least three separate individuals dressed in orange or red robes (Source: Private).



Figure 23: Image of a corpse, identified as female, killed along with other individuals in Nam Neint village (Source: Private).

In the photos posted to the pro-military Telegram channel, it is implied that the victims were all PDFs, killed by the military. Some of these images show weapons closed to the deceased individuals.

An analysis of the weapons indicates the possibility that they were placed next to the deceased individuals after their deaths. The guns do not appear bloody and they appear to be placed next to or on top of the individuals (Figure 24). This could indicate that the images were staged. The same weapons are also not present in the images uploaded by the KNDF - implying that they were removed from the scene sometime between the first set of images being taken (uploaded by the pro-military Telegram channel) and the second set of images (released by the KNDF).



Figure 24: Guns identified by Myanmar Witness appear to be 'placed' close to individuals with little evidence of them being bloodied. (Source: Private)

The images also show bullet marks in the walls and blood splatters (Figure 25). This could indicate that the individuals were shot at close-range. The individuals pictured in many of the images are dressed in civilian clothing and some appear to be middle-aged or elderly, as seen by their facial features.



Figure 25: Individuals appear to have been shot at a close range. Bullets have penetrated the monastery walls (Source: Private).

Attribution

There are different narratives around this incident; however, both pro-military Telegram channels and local resistance groups have attributed the killings to the Myanmar military. The local PDF and KNDF accuse the Myanmar military of a massacre, resulting in the death of civilians and monks.

[The Irrawaddy](#) reported that, in the case of the Nam Neint village killings, the operation was carried out by Brigadier General Nay Lin Aung from Military Operations Command No. 7 based in Pekon Township (ဖယ်ခုံ), 36 km south of Pinlaung Township. The Irrawaddy also implicates Major General Myo Min Htun from the Eastern Command, which is active in Taunggyi township (တောင်ကြီး).

Myanmar Witness cannot confirm these allegations but can verify that the military were likely involved in the attack on Nam Neint village. Images geolocated to the Nam Neint Monastery compound show MA 5.56 bullets, M79 shells, a mortar round, and bullet cases labelled as manufactured at KaPaSa (ကပစ) factories - a known military provider. This suggests Myanmar military troops were present in the area (Figure 26, 27 and 28).

Coupled with the close time at which photos of the deceased were taken and uploaded to pro-military Telegram channels, before being uploaded at a later time by KNDF and other social media pages, it is likely pro-military actors - the Myanmar military itself - were involved in the killings.

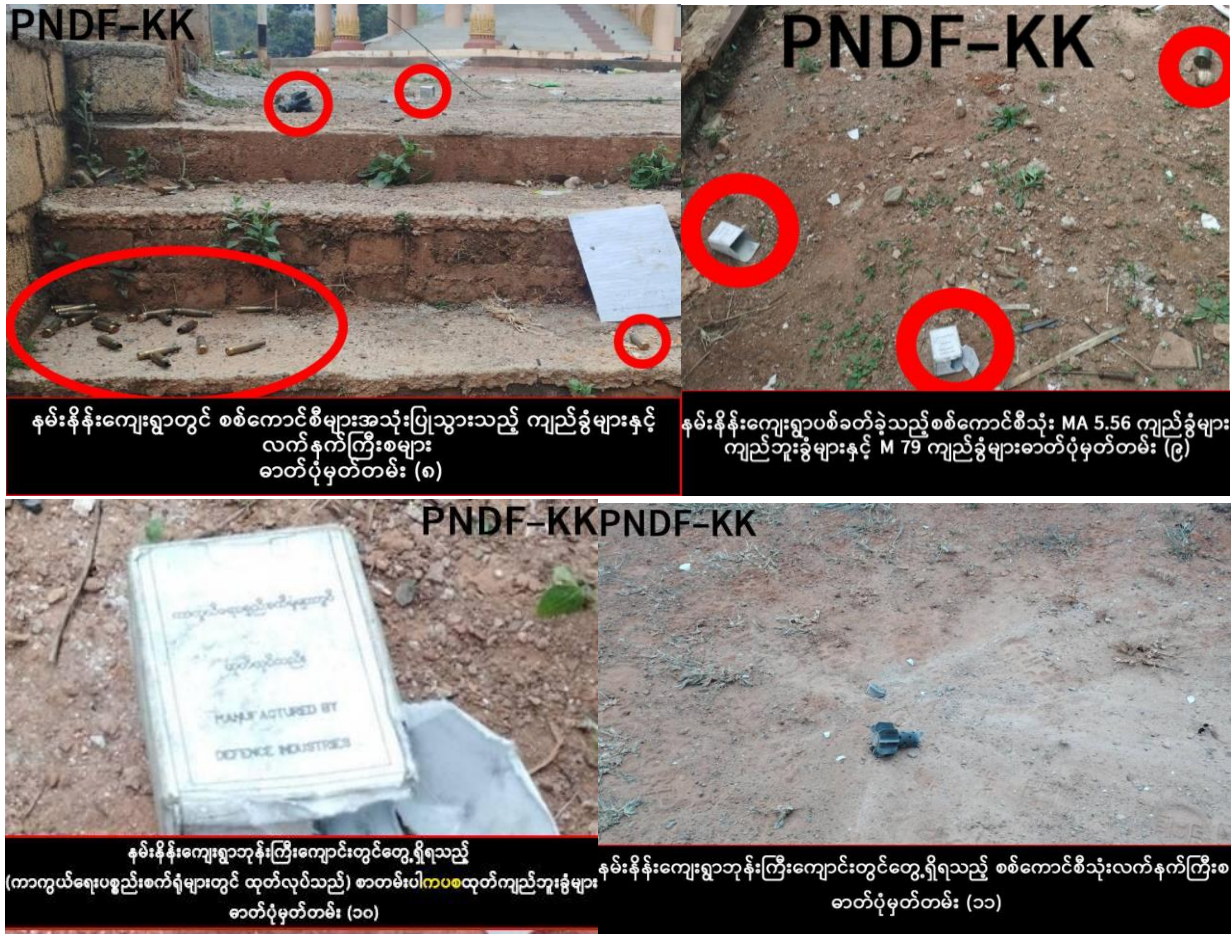


Figure 26: Bullet casings, a mortar round, and bullet packaging located in Nam Neint village. The paper translates to “ကာကွယ်ရေးပစ္စည်း စက်ရုံများတွင် ထုတ်လုပ်သည်” (Equipments manufactured in Ka Pa Sa Factories) (Source: [Shan News Burmese](#)).



Figure 27: Bullets, a mortar round, and bullet packaging located in Nam Neint village at around 19.900759, 96.835520 (Source: [Shan News Burmese](#)).



Figure 28: Geolocation of the bullets and mortar rounds in Nam Neint village on Satellites Pro Imagery (Source: [KNDF](#)).

A few days after the killings, Khit Thit Media uploaded images of pamphlets that were distributed after the incident in Nam Neint village which accuse the PDF and KNDF of perpetrating the incident. The pamphlets contained graphic imagery from the event (Figure 29). This narrative directly opposes that taken by the pro-military Telegram channel, who suggested the Myanmar military were in the village and responsible for killing PDF members (Figure 30). For example, the pro-military Telegram channel uploaded images containing text which stated: “giving a

lesson to Kayah Padaks (PDFs)", "the end of the Kayah Padaks (PDFs)", "Chastisement of the Kayah Padaks (PDFs)" and "Suppression of the Kayah Padaks (PDFs) drinking beer on the pagoda". The authors of, and rationale behind the pamphlets, remains unknown.

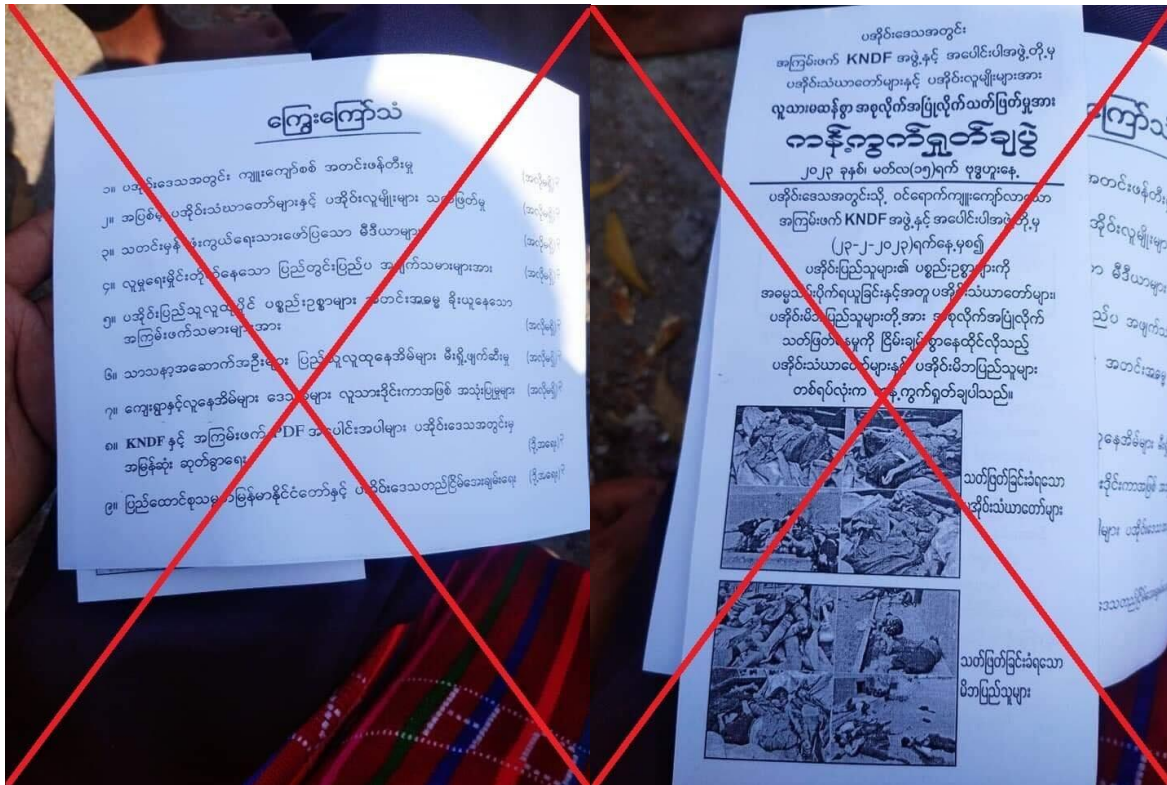


Figure 29: Leaflets claiming that the PDF and KNDF perpetrated the killings. This narrative directly opposes pro-military narratives that the military were killing PDFs in the village (Source: [Khit Thit Media](#)).



Figure 30: Sentences taken from the images uploaded by a pro-military Telegram channel. These read 'giving a lesson to Kayah Padaks (PDFs)' and 'Suppression of the Kayah Padaks (PDFs) while drinking beer on the pagoda' respectively. (Source: Private).

Conclusion and future monitoring

Pinlaung township has been the site of a number of clashes between the Myanmar military, military-allied forces, and local defence forces. The airstrike in Tawng Me Thin village and the massacre in Nam Neint village highlight the importance of continued monitoring of human rights interferences in Myanmar.

Myanmar Witness is continually investigating the conflict in Myanmar, in order to shed light on human rights interferences like these events. By analysing drone footage, Myanmar Witness was able to identify the aircraft involved in the airstrike on 28 February. This aircraft is only used by the Myanmar air force within Myanmar.

Through the geolocation and chronolocation of user-generated content (UGC) and use of FIRMS data, Myanmar Witness was able to determine that the massacre and fire in Nam Neint village likely occurred on 11 March 2023, between 0715 local time and 1045 local time.

Images which had been posted on social media showed the bodies of the deceased shortly after their deaths, while fires still burned in the background. According to the pro-Military Telegram channel, the victims were members of the PDF. However, the lack of combat gear, potential staging of arms within the photos and the presence of three individuals in monk's robes, could signal that these were civilians. While the perpetrators cannot be conclusively identified, there is information to suggest that the Myanmar military were present in the area.

Myanmar Witness will continue to monitor information related to this event in order to determine additional information about its circumstances, including seeking to verify the identities of both the victims and the perpetrators.

If you have any additional information on this event or others like it, please upload evidence [via our secure form](#) if safe to do so.

List of Abbreviations

- | | |
|---|---------|
| • User-generated content | UGC |
| • Karenni Nationalities Defense Force | KNDF |
| • Myanmar Air Force | MAF |
| • Pa-O National Army | PNA |
| • Pa-O National Organisation | PNO |
| • People's Defense Force | PDF |
| • Pa-Oh National Defense Force (Kham Koung) | PNDF-KK |
| • Fire Information for Resource Management System | FIRMS |