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Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

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Burma Army forces ethnic villagers in eastern Shan State to hold pro-coup rallies

On February 19 and 23, 2021, the Burma Army forced several thousand ethnic villagers in four townships of eastern Shan State to hold demonstrations in support of the February 1 coup.

On February 19, rallies were held in Mong Hsat, Mong Ton, and Mong Phyak townships, where Lahu, Akha and Shan villagers were forced to march in the streets holding Burmese national flags and pictures of General Min Aung Hlaing, and shout pro-Burma Army slogans including, “National stability and peace -- our cause!” and “Expose electoral fraud!”

They were also forced to shout “Preserve our national religion and race!” – the slogan of Burmese Buddhist nationalists -- despite their ethnicity, and despite many of the Lahu and Akha villagers being Christian.

The Burma Army organised the rallies through their local militia allies in each of the townships. The militia ordered villagers in their areas to gather in the towns at 9 am on February 19.

In Mong Hsat, one member of each household in about 20 militia-controlled villages around the town were ordered to join the rally. They were told that if they did not join, they would not be allowed to stay in their villages. Residents of Mong Hsat town were forbidden from coming out into the street during the rally, and were told they would be arrested if they did.

About 2,000 villagers joined the rally in Mong Hsat, and were given 2,500-3,000 kyat each. Lunch was also provided. The rally began with a speech by a Lahu member of the Burma Army-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), who said that those who did not support the Burma Army coup were traitors to their country.

In Mong Ton, a militia leader in Na Kong Mu ordered villagers to join the rally. Some received 5,000 kyat for joining, and some 20,000 kyat.

In a video of the Mong Ton rally released on social media, villagers can be heard telling each other: “Shout loudly!” “If you don’t shout, you will get arrested!” “You’re not here to walk, you’re here to shout!”

In Mong Phyak, a militia leader in Mong Yoom organised about 100 Lahu and Akha to join the rally. Those who joined received 6,000 kyat.

On February 23, an USDP member organized a pro-coup rally in Mong Khark, north of Kengtung, telling local Shan, Akha and Lahu villagers that anyone participating in the rally would receive 5,000

kyat. About 50 villagers from Mong Ka joined. They said they were not told that the rally was to support the Burma Army, and regretted joining.

Eastern Shan State is heavily militarized by the Burma Army. Military Operations Command 14 is based in Mong Hsat, and Military Operations Command 18 at Mong Phyak, each comprising 10 battalions. All are under the Triangle Region Command in Kengtung, where large-scale people's protests have been taking place against the military coup.

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