

'Sharp escalation' in fighting across Myanmar's Kachin state, warns rights expert

Raising alarm over a "sharp" escalation in hostilities in Myanmar's Kachin province, a United Nations human rights expert has called on all parties to ensure greater protection for civilians.

The military have reportedly carried out aerial bombing and used artillery and heavy weapons in civilian areas close to the border with China.

["Innocent civilians are being killed and injured"](#), and hundreds of families are now fleeing for their lives," Yanghee Lee, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar](#), said on Tuesday.

"What we are seeing in Kachin state over the past few weeks is wholly unacceptable, and must stop immediately."

According to UN reports, more than 5,000 civilians have been displaced from villages near the Chinese border in the last three weeks. Children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with disabilities are among those who have been displaced.

In a press statement, the UN rights expert reiterated that all parties to the conflict had to abide by international humanitarian law, and take precautions not to harm civilians.

"Civilians must never be subjected to violence during the course of conflict. All parties must take all necessary measures to ensure their safety and security," she said.

Civilians reportedly trapped in village

Ms. Lee also raised concern over reports that more than 100 civilians have been trapped in the village of Man Wai for the past three weeks, with inadequate access to food or medical supplies.

A food convoy, organized by the Myanmar Red Cross, was reportedly prevented from entering the village last week.

"All parties to the conflict must allow the passage of humanitarian assistance," said Ms. Lee. "Any wilful impediment of relief supplies may amount to war crimes under international law."

In March, as the world's attention was focused on the situation in Rakhine state and the Rohingya refugee crisis, the Special Rapporteur had raised alarm over deteriorating situation in Kachin, Shan and other conflict affected areas of Myanmar.

“In Kachin state, where sporadic violence and intermittent killings have been the norm in recent years, there has been an increase in the frequency and intensity of clashes between the Tatmadaw [Myanmar’s armed forces] and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) since October 2017, resulting in deaths and the displacement of the civilian population,” Ms. Lee said in her [report](#) to the Human Rights Council.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation, without drawing any UN salary for their work.