

Mass arrests at the White Coats Protest

Report 1: Mass detentions following the February 2021 coup

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 28 February 2023

Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:** Yankin township (ရန်ကင်းမြို့နယ်), Yangon (ရန်ကုန်မြို့) [16.832556, 96.167556].
- **Date/Time of Incident:**
 - 28 February 2021
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**
 - Myanmar Police Force
 - Lon Htein Battalion 1
 - Lon Htein Battalion 5
- **Summary of Investigation:**
 - This report focuses on the White Coats Protest in Yankin, Yangon on 28 February, where several thousand doctors, nurses and students from Yangon's universities had gathered, and over 100 protestors were detained.
 - Myanmar Witness has fully verified over 30 videos and images from this event, including drone footage and Facebook live streams. All content included or referenced within this report is fully verified, unless otherwise stated.
 - Using these videos and images, Myanmar Witness has created a detailed reconstruction of the events which took place between 0820 and 0905 on 28 February 2021.
 - The Myanmar Police can be seen using sound grenades and tear gas against the protestors.
 - The police are also seen loading protestors into police trucks.

Executive Summary

Following the 1 February 2021 Coup, Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) [stripped](#) away due process and fair trial rights to detain thousands of protestors, activists and human rights defenders. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [reported](#) that the vast majority of these deprivations of liberty were carried out without respect for the rule of law or in accordance with international human rights standards, therefore constituting arbitrary and unlawful detention.

This series of case studies documents four separate incidents in Yankin, Tamwe, North Okkalapa and Lanmadaw in late February and early March 2021. The first three reports cover mass detentions of protestors, while the fourth examines a case of mass detention of community members, following an incident involving alleged undercover military officers in the same area.

Over 100 individuals were arrested at each of the three protests investigated by Myanmar Witness. In all three cases, there is no evidence to indicate that the protests were anything but peaceful. Myanmar Witness has analysed, verified and triangulated multiple pieces of footage to develop a detailed timeline and map of events leading up to and including the detention of the protestors. Sound grenades, teargas and live ammunition was used on the protestors.

This report looks at the White Coats Protest in Yankin, Yangon on 28 February 2021, where several thousand doctors, nurses and students from Yangon's universities had gathered, and over 100 protestors were detained. It provides a detailed reconstruction of events by piecing together over 30 pieces of open source user-generated content (UGC) which were uploaded to social media.

These examples of mass detentions are being released to mark two years passing since their occurrence; however, they are by no means exhaustive. Myanmar Witness continues to monitor the deprivation of civilian liberties.

Background and location

On the morning of 28 February 2021, a 'White Coats' protest of several thousand doctors, nurses and students from Yangon's universities gathered in Yankin township. As the march was setting off, police charged the rear of the protest. Footage verified by Myanmar Witness shows over 100 protestors being detained. The [Irrawaddy](#) reported that over 200 people were detained on this one day alone.

Both male and female protestors were involved in this incident. Due to the nature of the footage and the number of individuals involved, it is not possible to accurately disaggregate this number by gender. In the footage Myanmar Witness has verified, men appear to outnumber women.

Myanmar Witness has fully verified over 30 videos and images from multiple angles, including drone footage and Facebook live streams, allowing for an accurate reconstruction of the events which took place between 0820 and 0905. All material is fully verified unless otherwise stated.

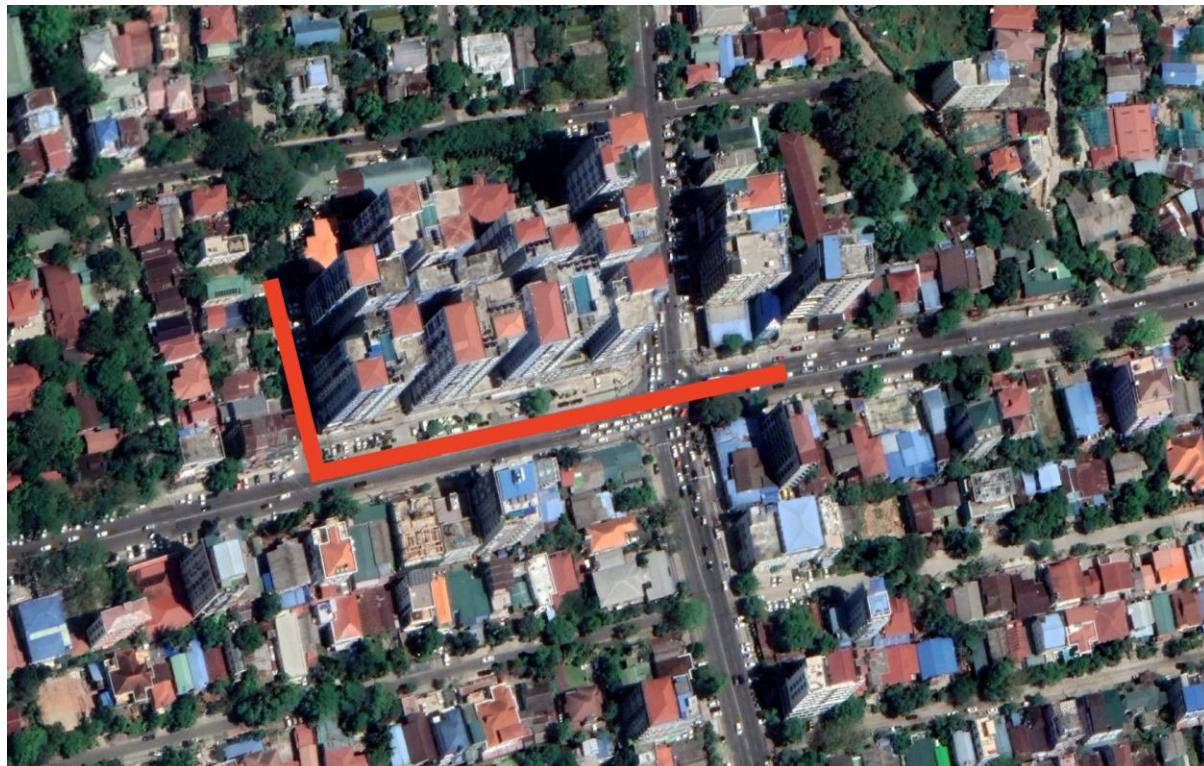


Figure 1: Protest Area, Aung Zaya Road, Yankin Township [16.833472, 96.172028]. The red line shows the area where the crackdown occurred.

The Investigation - a chronological walkthrough

This section provides a detailed chronological breakdown of events which occurred at the White Coats protest on 28 February 2021 in Yangon. By analysing multiple verified videos posted to social media, Myanmar Witness was able to reconstruct the protest.



Figure 2: Overview of events in Yankin on 28 February, 2021. Location: 16.833472, 96.172028

0820: Several thousand protestors, mostly medical students, gathered in Yankin for the start of a 'White Coats' protest. Drone [footage](#) widely shared on social media and verified by Myanmar Witness, shows the front of the march (located at: 16.833472, 96.172028) moving east along Aung Zeya Road, with participants filling one side of the road and spanning an approximate 500m distance. The back of the march (located at: 16.832556, 96.167556) is marked by a line of stewards wearing yellow vests (Figure 3). Behind the stewards wearing

yellow, a line of police officers is visible. Protestors waiting to join the back of the march are queuing down a narrow street to the north, alongside an apartment complex.



Figure 3: Capture (02:01) from the drone footage shows police advancing on the yellow-vested stewards (shown by the red rectangle). The column of protestors can be seen in the narrow road north alongside the housing complex (blue arrow).

0822: The drone footage (Figure 4) and verified videos from three alternative angles (redacted due to privacy concerns) captures the moment police charge, using sound grenades to disperse the crowd. The line of stewards immediately breaks and police advance to the junction with the narrow street. Protestors flee east along Aung Zeya Road as well as north up the narrow street.



Figure 4: Capture (02:10) from the drone footage shows the line of yellow-clothed stewards fracturing as the police charge (outlined in the red box).

The chronology of events depicted in the UGC was ascertained by analysing the location and movements of protestors, police and vehicles, and the use of sound and flash grenades in footage.



Figure 5: Capture (00:07) from a second video angle ([Twitter](#)) shows the same moment the police charge the yellow-clothed line. From the movement of vehicles, the start of the footage aligns with 00:28 of the drone footage.



Figure 6: Capture (00:04) from a third video angle ([Twitter](#)) can be synchronised by a flash from a grenade thrown by the police. The flash (circled and magnified above) appears at 00:27 in the drone footage.

0823: As police violently detain protesters in the main street (see: [Twitter](#), [Twitter](#)), over 30 police enter the narrow street, throwing sound grenades as they advance on a tightly-packed column of protesters who had been waiting to join the march. While Myanmar Witness has not identified the model, the six-round sound grenades were widely used by police against protesters in Yangon in February and March 2021, including in North Okkalapa on 10 March. Footage shot by protesters in the street shows them fleeing as police charge. A Facebook live stream (account deleted but excerpts shared on [Twitter](#)), filmed from near the front of the waiting column of protesters, shows the sound grenades being thrown at the protesters (Figure 9). A second angle filmed from a building above shows that while most protesters fled up the street, a group took cover behind parked cars next to the apartment complex (Figure 10, source redacted due to privacy concerns).

Figure 7: A magnified capture from 01:07 secs of the drone footage shows police following the protestors north up the narrow street next to the housing complex.



Figure 8: Capture from 00:07 of footage ([Twitter](#)), showing the column of students as police arrive at the end of the road, matching with approximately 01:00 mark in the drone footage.

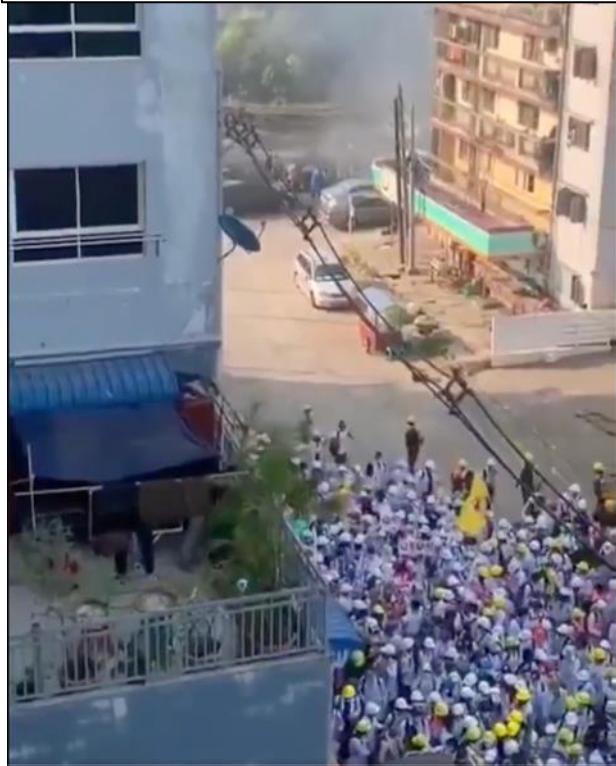


Figure 9: A series of frames from 00:26 of footage ([Twitter](#)), showing a sound grenade (circled red) thrown by the police at the column of protestors.



*Figure 10:
Capture from
00:14 of
footage
showing a
group of
protestors
seeking
shelter
behind
parked cars
as police
advance.
Source
redacted for
privacy
concerns.*

Pinned between the wall of the apartments and parked cars, the group of over 100 protesters cannot escape as police move up the street, chasing the rest of the column north before setting up a police line halfway up the street ([Twitter](#)). The protestors trapped behind the cars are surrounded by the police, who keep them contained. Footage posted to social media provides three different angles of the protestors being held behind the vehicles before being taken to police trucks brought into the street.



Figure 11: Capture (00:05) of footage shot from apartment complex showing the large number of protestors behind the cars ([Twitter](#)).



Figure 12: Capture (00:04) of footage shot from an alternative angle on the roof of the apartment complex showing protestors being taken to the trucks ([Twitter](#)).



Figure 13: Capture (00:55) of a video ([Facebook](#)) showing a third angle of the protestors being loaded into the trucks.

0845: On the main street, Aung Zeya Road, police form a line to cordon off the area, facing protesters who are gathered at the junction of Aung Zeya and Moe Kaung Road (see Figures above).

A 20-minute Facebook live stream filmed among protestors at the junction (source redacted for privacy concerns), timestamped at 0845, shows protestors chanting at the police and using megaphones. Police are seen gathered down the street, forming a line and beginning to advance slowly, firing tear gas. Police first fired teargas at 03:52 mark (0849) and again approximately 40 seconds later. As the video continues, the filer moves among the crowd showing people washing their eyes and face with water to counter the tear gas. At 16:40 (0902) police markedly increased the rate of firing, shooting at least 14 rounds before the video ended at 0905.

0902: A second verified video posted on Twitter taken from behind and above the police line in the apartment complex shows the police firing three rounds of tear gas (Figure 14; the source has been redacted for privacy concerns). The intervals between the rounds allow Myanmar Witness to match it with the timestamped Facebook live stream, chrono-locating the clip at 0902.



Figure 14: Capture (04:00) of Facebook Live stream showing tear gas landing among protestors at the junction ([Facebook](#)).



Figure 16: Capture (00:26) of video posted on social media ([Twitter](#)) shows the police firing tear gas at 0902.

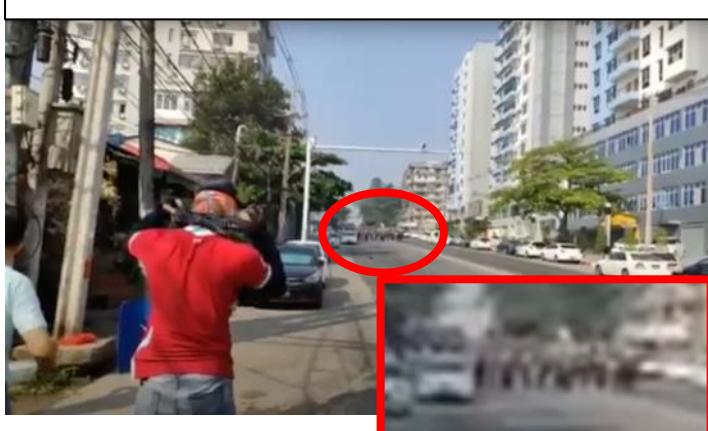


Figure 15: Capture (10:40) of Facebook Live stream showing police line, circled red and magnified ([Facebook](#)).

Videos and photos posted on social media on the day claimed to show detained protesters being transported around Yangon (sources redacted due to privacy concerns), with one giving a location of “near Pyay Road” and claiming police had asked for 13M Kyats (approximately USD10,000) for bail – a claim widely repeated on social media. Protestors shown in these images are wearing white coats, but it is not possible to determine whether they are the same protestors seen detained in the Figures above or whether. Other social media posts on the day and the weeks after suggested the student protestors had been taken to Insein prison in Yangon, but it was not possible to verify this.

Attribution to the Lon Htein (Riot Police)

By analysing the uniform of the officers involved in this event, Myanmar Witness was able to identify them as members of the Lon Htein (Riot Security Forces). For example, the patch

visible on the personnels' right arms signals membership of Lon Htein, and the red scarves tied around their necks provide further insight.

The blue circles on the scarves state that these individuals belong to the Lon Htein Battalion 5. This battalion's base is located at Hmawbi. Other images show that members of Battalion 1 were also present. The Lon Htein are renowned for their brutality and Myanmar Witness has reported on their activity within the Police and Harassment series.

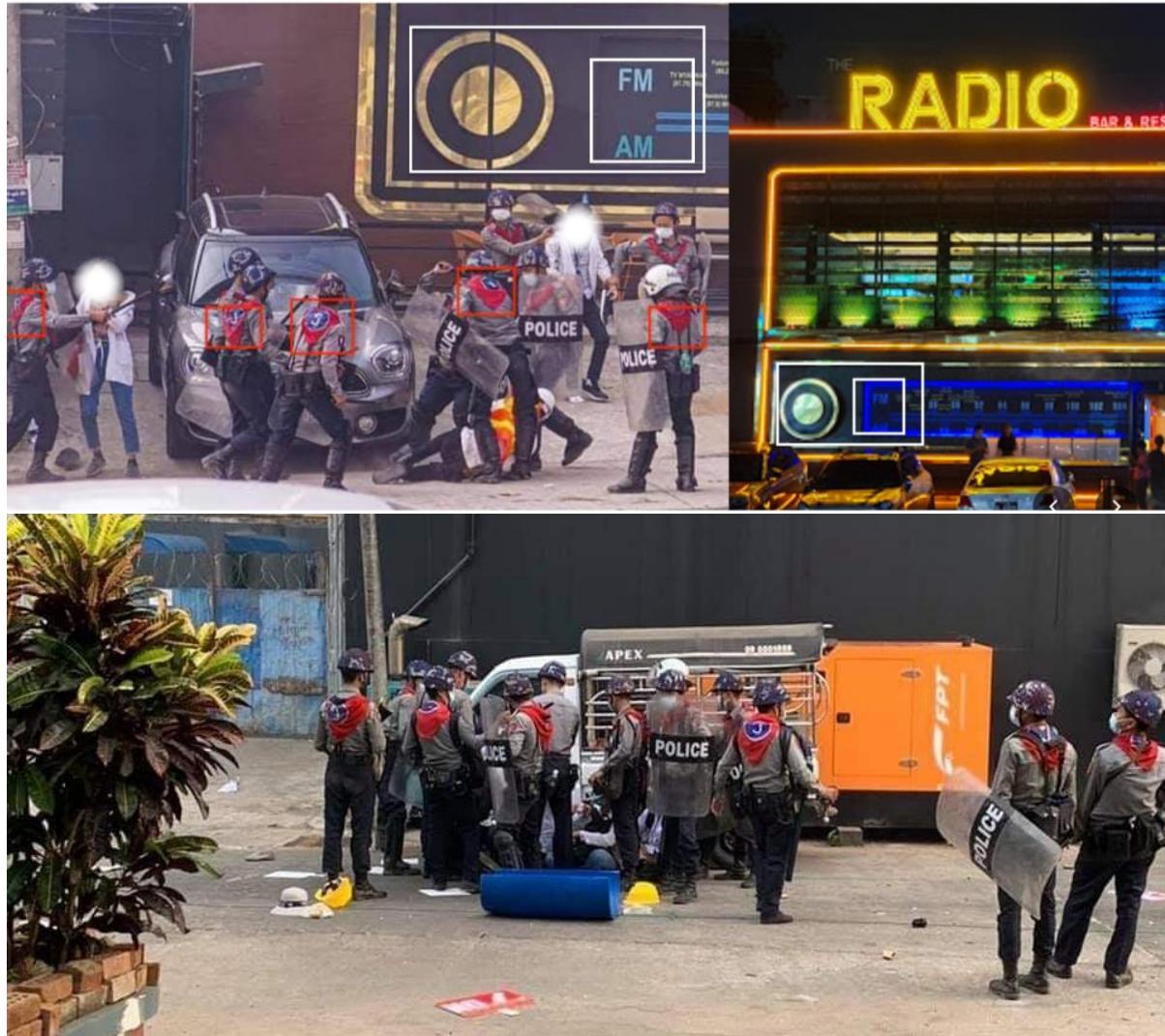


Figure 17: Images showing the Lon Htein (riot police) at the location of the protests attacking protestors in white coats. Sources redacted due to privacy concerns. Top image geolocated to: 16.832565, 96.168068.

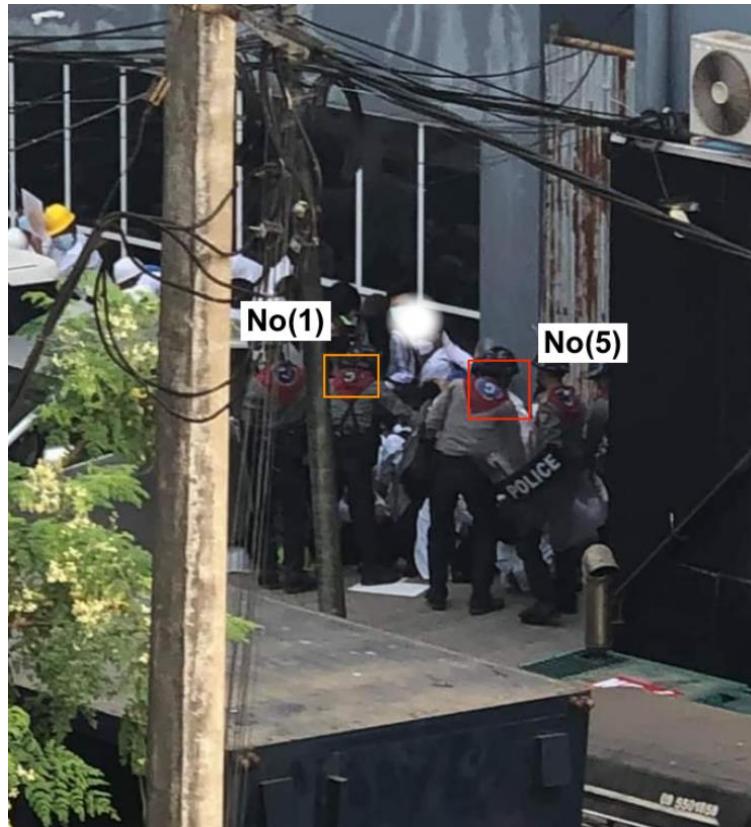


Figure 18: Image showing both members of Battalion 1 and 5 detaining protestors in white coats. Source redacted due to privacy concerns.

Conclusion and future monitoring

This detailed reconstruction of events at the White Coats Protest in Yankin, Yangon on 28 February, demonstrates the Myanmar military's use of force against protestors. On this day over 100 protestors were detained.

This series of case studies documents a number of early incidents involving violence against protestors and the deprivation of liberty of those who opposed the coup. As these case studies show, in the months following the coup, sound grenades, teargas, and live ammunition have been used on protestors and hundreds were detained.

Two years have passed since these events occurred in Yankin, Tamwe, North Okkalapa and Lanmadaw; however, the military continues to crack down on dissent. Myanmar Witness continues to monitor protest events and the instances of violence and intimidation they are met with.