



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

*The Karen Human Rights Group Statement on the
16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign*

From 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign is a time to both reflect on violence against women and to take action to end it. Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread and persistent human rights violations in our world today. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) stands in solidarity with those fighting to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

For the past 25 years, KHRG has worked tirelessly to document and report on the human rights situation and to project the voices of villagers in southeast Myanmar. Throughout 25 years of KHRG reporting, gender-based violence (GBV) has occurred and continues to occur throughout southeast Myanmar in a range of different contexts, places and to a variety of women, with extensive repercussions for women and limited consequences for the perpetrator. Based on KHRG analysis between 1992 and 2012, widespread sexual assault and rape of women by Tatmadaw was ingrained in military tactics of civilian abuse. Since the preliminary ceasefire in 2012, the number of sexual assaults and rapes perpetrated by armed actors has decreased compared to the past, however, these abuses continue, often with impunity.

Cases since the preliminary ceasefire demonstrate the insecure and unsafe environment in southeast Myanmar for women. Moreover, justice for victims of sexual abuse is still a major issue, even more so for underage victims and victims with perceived mental health problems. This serious problem is compounded in cases where the perpetrators are powerful actors such as military personnel.

The lack of comprehensive protections for women under the law prevents an effective and coordinated response to violence against women from becoming a reality. Comprehensive legislation on violence against women is essential in supporting efforts to provide justice, support, protection and remedies to victims and to hold perpetrators accountable.

Under international law, the Myanmar Government has clear obligations to enact, implement and monitor legislation addressing all forms of violence against women. Myanmar is obligated to do so under the several binding UN Security Council resolutions such as 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013) (these were all unanimously adopted by the 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council). Also, Myanmar has already endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2013 and Myanmar is also a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Myanmar Government is failing to live up to its international obligations and commitments to prevent and address violence against women. Taking the opportunity of celebrating this year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign, KHRG recommends:

- The Government of Myanmar to improve justice mechanisms and enact the Protection and Prevention of Violence Against Women (PoVAW) Bill without delay, taking recommendations from civil society organisations into due consideration, so that women can safely report cases of gender-based violence and other abuse to local authorities who can bring the perpetrators before independent and impartial civilian courts.
- The Government of Myanmar and/or the Karen National Union (KNU) to ensure that local officials, village heads, law enforcement authorities and military actors are trained in gender sensitivity to appropriately respond to cases of gender-based violence and that their awareness is raised to change practices and social norms that are harmful for women. Moreover, justice mechanisms should be improved so that women can safely report cases of gender-based violence and other abuse, such as land confiscations, to local authorities who can bring the perpetrators before independent and impartial civilian courts.
- The Tatmadaw, Border Guard Forces, and ethnic armed organisations hold military personnel accountable for violence against women in fair and transparent judicial processes, whilst paying due regard to gender sensitivities of the female victims, in accordance with Articles 1 and 2 of CEDAW and CEDAW General Recommendations 19 and 33.
- The Myanmar Ministry of Education and the Karen Education Department should ensure schools include awareness-raising on sexual violence and gender sensitivity in their curricula in accordance with Article 10 of CEDAW and CEDAW General Recommendations 3 and 19.
- The Government of Myanmar should ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW (OP-CEDAW) so that women can submit individual complaints to the CEDAW Committee.

#16Days #EndViolenceAgainstWomen

#WomensRightsAreHumanRights #KHRG

See KHRG's report on the human rights of women in southeast Myanmar here:

<http://khr.org/2016/08/hidden-strengths-hidden-struggles-women%E2%80%99s-testimonies-southeast-myanmar>

See KHRG's CEDAW submission here:

<http://khr.org/2016/06/submission-committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women-cedaw-64th-session>