



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

November 25th, 2021

From 25 November to 10 December, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) will observe the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign. KHRG reaffirms the need to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

Women in Myanmar have consistently placed themselves on the frontline in standing up for justice. Since the February 2021 military coup, women of all ages across Myanmar have taken a lead role in opposing the military regime to fight for a better future for their children. They have been shot, killed, beaten, and arrested so that the horrors of the past do not return.

Military offensives in Southeast Myanmar have compromised women's health and reproductive rights. The military's deliberate bombing of villages in March and April led to the displacement of thousands of civilians. Many civilians fled into the jungles and to the Salween River. Among them were pregnant women who were forced to give birth and nurse their infants while fleeing, placing their own health and that of their baby at extreme risk.

Furthermore, the increasing militarization of southeast Myanmar puts women and girls at risk of forced labor. KHRG has received reports on the military's reliance on civilians to transport their equipment and rations. Since forced portering was one of the most common forms of abuse under past military regimes, many men have fled from their villages, leaving women and children alone and thus more vulnerable to threats and sexual violence by local soldiers. Women are increasingly being forced to serve as porters, navigators, often in mine-contaminated areas, and as human shields against enemy attack. In August, three women were arrested and beaten by the Myanmar military prior to being forced to carry supplies and serve as human shields.

Before the coup, Myanmar lacked comprehensive protection for women under domestic law, which prevented an effective and coordinated response to violence against women. The military coup has eliminated even the slightest possibility of access to justice or of holding perpetrators accountable for acts of GBV against women and girls at the national level. Under international law, Myanmar has clear obligations to enact, implement and monitor legislation addressing all forms of violence against women. Myanmar became a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1997 and endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2013. Yet, from the outset, the junta has systematically perpetrated violence against women and girls across Myanmar. The junta clearly cannot be expected, now or in the future, to fulfil the international obligations and commitments binding upon the state of Myanmar to prevent and address violence against women.

In observing this year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign, KHRG urges the international community to take more concrete action in addressing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and the problems of impunity that allow the Myanmar military to continue engaging in these forms of violence.