



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

## International Women's Day

8<sup>th</sup> March 2022

As today, March 8<sup>th</sup>, marks International Women's Day, KHRG would like to honor all the women who have defended human rights and continue to do so in this critical time. We extend our appreciation for their contributions, dedication and achievements now and in the past. This year's theme for International Women's Day is "Break the Bias" meaning that all of us, collectively, must work together to break gender bias and ensure women's equality. Whether deliberate or unconscious, bias makes it difficult for women to move ahead. Bias against women exists at every level of our communities and can only be broken if each of us is active in fighting against it.

Since the military coup on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, women have actively led and participated in the fight for human rights and democracy. Women led the first anti-coup protests and the first person to be killed in anti-coup protests was a woman. Since then, countless women have made unspeakable sacrifices in the fight for democracy and human rights. As the situation in Burma/Myanmar has become increasingly dangerous and unpredictable, more and more women have become victims of killing, torture, rape and detention. However, women are choosing to fight back at whatever cost to regain their rights and the rights of all people in Burma/Myanmar.

During past periods of armed conflict in Burma, women often assumed positions of authority within their communities, despite the risk to their own security. Due to fighting and human rights abuses, many men fled their villages or went to fight on the frontlines, leaving women to take on leadership roles traditionally occupied by men. Following ceasefire agreements in 2015, men have taken back positions of authority. Women in Burma, however, continue to actively fight for human rights and a better future for their children, yet often in the margins. As armed conflict has resumed, women are once again taking on risky positions within their communities. Women's voices and their leadership need to be recognised and promoted in this critical time, but also ensured into the future.

In Southeast Burma where armed conflict is escalating, thousands of civilians have been displaced, including women and children. Displaced mothers and pregnant women are living in conditions unsafe for childbirth and adverse to the caring of young children. Displacement sites leave women subject to physical security, food insecurity, poor sanitation, COVID-19 infection and other illnesses, inclement weather, and other unforeseeable threats. The defence of human rights is thus critical to the defence of women's rights in such situations.

Today, we would like to honour all the women who have given or dedicated their lives for others, women who have fallen victim to atrocities and chose to fight, and women who take care of and protect their communities. As we recognize these women and their courage, all of us must continue fighting for a more equal world where there is no more bias, stereotypes and discrimination.