



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

June 19th 2021

Today is International Day for Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The term “conflict-related sexual violence” refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for the purpose of sexual violence or exploitation.

Sexual violence is often used deliberately as a weapon in armed conflicts; this holds true for the conflict in Myanmar. In the decades-long conflict with the Karen National Union, the Tatmadaw has allowed its soldiers to commit sexual violence on civilians with impunity. Between January 2012 and November 2018, KHRG received 52 reports covering 27 cases of sexual violence, including seven cases in 2018 alone.¹ KHRG still receives reports of sexual violence cases as recent as 2019.²

Since the military coup on February 1, women and girls throughout the country are even more vulnerable to sexual violence. Women and girls have been subjected to sexual violence and other forms of gendered harassment while being held in detention facilities. In particular, sexual violence has been used by security forces, including members of the military, police and prison guard, when interrogating women and girls.³

The practice of impunity by the Tatmadaw is what has allowed such widespread sexual violence to occur. Perpetrators are rarely, if ever, held accountable for their crimes which encourages further violations in the future. Most victims of conflict-related sexual violence still have not received justice and, in many cases, have not even had the chance to report on, or speak about what happened to them.

Sexual violence survivors should be given the opportunity to speak out, to receive remedy which includes physical and mental health support, and the means to reintegrate into society without any

¹KHRG, [Suffering in silence? Sexual violence against women in Southeast Myanmar](#) (December 2018)

² KHRG, News Bulletin, [‘He only let me go after he finished raping me’: Sexual Violence in Southeast Myanmar](#), 2019

³ Human Rights Watch, [‘Rights of Women Violated in Myanmar Prisons’](#) (June 8, 2021); The Irrawaddy, [‘Some young women arrested are being sexually assaulted’](#) [in Burmese] (April 23, 2021).

prejudice or discrimination. KHRG urges ethnic organizations to help the survivors receive the kind of support listed above.

The international community, including organizations with a mandate to investigate and/or to prosecute international crimes, must ensure that perpetrators in the past, present and future, are held accountable for their crimes without any excuses. States must also place pressure on the Tatmadaw to stop the perpetration of sexual violence and ensure accountability within their ranks. Failing to address and investigate abuses will only prove that the military and other security forces can continue to commit sexual violence with impunity.

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