



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

**International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations
and for the Dignity of Victims**

24 March 2021

As the world observes the International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims, KHRG calls on the international community to take concrete actions to break the cycle of impunity in Myanmar and deliver justice and reparation to countless victims of past human rights violations.

KHRG's documentation shows that, before the initial 2012 ceasefire agreements, the Myanmar military carried out systematic attacks against civilians in many parts of Southeast Myanmar. The military subjected Karen villagers to a wide range of human rights violations, including killings, torture, widespread sexual violence against women and forced labour. Yet, the vast majority of these abuses have met with total impunity. The Myanmar government has showed no willingness to bring perpetrators to justice; and the military and former junta officials remain shielded from prosecution by law. On several instances after taking office, Aung San Suu Kyi, even called on the population to "forgive and forget" the past as the best means to achieving national reconciliation, an approach that ignored the truth and left no room for the recognition of past abuses.

This inertia has had dire consequences for the victims. Countless survivors of human rights violations are still struggling with long-term health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorders and physical disabilities. Many have been unable to re-establish sustainable livelihoods after losing their land, property or loved ones as a result of the gross abuses perpetrated by the military. Denied acknowledgment of the violence enacted upon them and left without appropriate access to reparations and support, they will most likely continue to struggle. Unfortunately, the recent developments in Myanmar made clear that justice and reparations are nowhere in sight.

On February 1st 2021, the same military that subjected its own citizens to gross human rights violations during decades illegally seized power. In the weeks following the coup, it demonstrated once again how little it cares about human rights by violently cracking down on peaceful protesters opposing military rule. As of March 22nd 2021, 261 civilians have been killed by security forces. The authorities have implemented internet restrictions, cracked down on the free press and even went as far as to drag dead bodies away in a desperate attempt to hide the material evidence of their crimes. The length to which the junta seem ready to go to control the narrative on these events makes it clear that it does not want the international community to know the truth about what is happening. So far, these attempts have failed thanks to the bravery of the local journalists, activists and citizens who tirelessly document the abuses of the junta at the risk of their lives.

KHRG would like to acknowledge and pay tribute to the actions of those anonymous heroes and to those who lost their lives in Myanmar's struggle for human rights. The developments the country has witnessed over the past decade have made clear that, as long as the military is allowed to retain significant political power, domestic mechanisms will never be able to deliver justice for the victims of human rights violations. With the military now presiding over the destiny

of the country, the international community must step in to ensure that its leaders are held accountable for its crimes, past and present. Only in this way will the survivors of the military's abusive power be given the right to truth.