



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

19th June

On this International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, KHRG stands with all victims and survivors of sexual violence in Burma. The Burma Army has a long history of using sexual violence as a weapon of war against civilians. As the military continues its reign of terror, KHRG condemns all crimes committed under conflict, including sexual and gender-based violence.

KHRG recognises the gendered dynamics and impacts of war, as well as the nexus between sexual violence during conflict and conceptualizations of masculinity. Systematic and widespread crimes of sexual violence have been committed by Burma Army officers and their troops, including the current junta, upon both women and men, and are used to support structures of military power and subjugate dissidents, as well as inflict terror and repression.

One survivor from Doo Tha Htoo District (Thaton), who was captured by Burma soldiers and forced to porter, explained in 1992: *“All night long the soldiers would come and drag women away to be raped. They took turns and women were often raped by several soldiers in one night. [...] While I was being raped or trying to sleep I could hear the screams of other women all around. This went on all night, and then in the morning they’d make us carry our loads over mountains again.”* She endured this violence for 22 days prior to escaping.

Another survivor from Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District recounted being repeatedly violated in 1992 by the officer in charge while being held captive as a porter: *“He just kept threatening that he’d give me to his men who’d rape me to death, waving his knife and demanding sex. I kept fighting but he tied up my other hand, and then he pushed me down and raped me.”* Such forms of violence have continued unabated under successive military regimes.

Since the 2021 military coup, feelings of fear and insecurity are constantly reported to KHRG by villagers in Karen State, especially by women, as widespread sexual crimes continue to be committed with impunity. Just the presence of soldiers in and near their villages has triggered memories of past violence, leading many to send young women to hiding sites. One IDP from the Lay Kay area (Doo Tha Htoo District) highlighted that due

to the presence of soldiers in her village, “*I do not let my younger sister return [from the hiding site] because I am afraid [fear sexual violence against her].*”

Given the current difficulty of crossing international borders to seek refuge and protection, all villagers, including those facing displacement, are at increased and constant risk of sexual and other gender-based crimes at the hands of the military. Bearing this severe situation in mind, KHRG argues for strong and immediate action to be taken against the military junta. Sexual violence as a weapon of war will continue to be perpetrated by the junta as long as the military escape accountability for their crimes.

Recommendations

To international bodies, regional and foreign governments, and funding agencies:

- Acknowledge that the military junta is the root cause of the current human rights crisis in Burma, and refrain from giving them any political legitimacy;
- Undertake the appropriate measures to punish and combat sexual violence committed by military personnel, police officers and other junta servants, both against women and men;
- Take the necessary measures to bring military leaders who permitted and perpetuated these crimes to justice, including by referring junta leaders to international courts;
- Adopt a victim-centred approach in criminal proceedings, in a way that prevents the revictimization of survivors, ensures their safety, and protects their identity;
- Acknowledge the difficulty for survivors to seek justice under the current political situation, leading to an even greater need for protection services and support;
- Assist in the creation of shelters for victims of sexual and gender-based violence, both locally and across the border.

#EliminationofSexualViolenceInConflict

#EndRapeInConflict