



## Statement on International Human Rights Day 2024

10<sup>th</sup> December 2024

On this International Human Rights Day, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reaffirms its unwavering commitment to human rights and stands in solidarity with human rights defenders and human rights organisations who courageously try to protect and uphold human rights for the peoples of Burma. At the same time, KHRG draws international attention to the deteriorating human rights situation in Southeast Burma, fuelled by the Burma military junta's relentless violence, abuses, and impunity. As the Human Rights Day's theme for this year is "Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now," KHRG calls on the international community to take joint and concrete action to end the military junta's cruel human rights abuses against civilians and to protect the rights and future of the peoples of Burma.

The human rights situation continues to drastically worsen since the military coup in February 2021, which reinstated authoritarian rule. The State Administration Council (SAC), led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has unleashed a new wave of violence across the country, employing tactics similar to those of previous military juntas, including the 'four cuts' strategy.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the Burma military has continued to violate international human rights and humanitarian law through its armed attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killings, mass arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, and enforced disappearances. Some of the forcibly disappeared, including women and children, are used as porters, navigators, human shields, and, at times, human minesweepers.<sup>2</sup> Women and girls are being subjected to severe abuse, including sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> Armed attacks on villages have included the widespread use of air strikes, shelling and landmines.<sup>4</sup> In consequence, the estimated number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in locally-defined Karen State has exceeded one million,<sup>5</sup> accompanied by an escalating humanitarian crisis aggravated by the military's heavy restrictions on movement and trade impacting livelihood

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG, *Why would they target us?: Exploring patterns of the Burma Army's retaliatory abuses against villagers across Southeast Burma*, June 2023.

<sup>2</sup> KHRG, *In the Dark: The crime of enforced disappearance and its impacts on the rural communities of Southeast Burma since the 2021 coup*, November 2023.

<sup>3</sup> KHRG, "Statement on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women", November 2024. See also, KHRG, *Taw Oo District Incident Report: An SAC soldier committed conflict-related sexual violence against a 90-year-old villager in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township*, November 2023.

KHRG, *တပ်မတော်လေကြောင်း လာရောက်ခြင်း : Impacts of air strikes on local communities and villagers' protection strategies in Southeast Burma since the 2021 coup*, November 2024; KHRG, *Danger Beneath Our Feet - Landmine contamination in Southeast Burma and its impacts on villagers since the 2021 coup*, December 2023; KHRG, *Striking Fear: Impacts of State Administration Council (SAC) shelling on villagers' lives in Southeast Burma (January to October 2023)*, December 2023. <sup>5</sup> As of August 2024, the number of IDPs in Karen State is estimated to be 1,002,377. See: Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), "Kawthoolei-Displacement Map", August 2024. [on file]

<sup>5</sup> As of August 2024, the number of IDPs in Karen State is estimated to be 1,002,377. See: Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), "Kawthoolei-Displacement Map", August 2024. [on file]

activities, as well as the destruction and confiscation of foodstuffs and medical supplies at checkpoints.<sup>6</sup> Impunity for these acts has prevailed.

The failure of the international community to take concrete actions against the military junta has allowed it to continue perpetrating gross human rights abuses against civilians with complete impunity. To address the critical human rights situation and humanitarian crisis in Burma, it is vital to recognise its root causes. Unless the international community is prepared to listen to the people of Burma and work together to take strong and decisive action to stop the junta leaders and hold them accountable for the wide range of abuses they continue to commit, the suffering of the country's civilians will persist. On this International Human Rights Day, KHRG urges international civil society and stakeholders, and foreign governments to:

- Urgently raise awareness about the escalating human rights and humanitarian crisis in Southeast Burma and advocate for immediate action to address the dire situation.
- Acknowledge that the military junta is the root cause of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis, as well as the reason for massive displacement in Burma.
- Refrain from engaging in any form of collaboration with the junta, including military and economic collaboration, that will help them to continue their cruel human rights abuses against civilians.
- Engage in and support current investigations and proceedings to prosecute junta leaders and seek out all additional opportunities to hold the Burma military accountable for its vast array of crimes, including past and present abuses committed in Karen State.
- Support local community-based and civil society organisations (CBOs/CSOs) and individual human rights defenders in their effort to advocate for the protection and promotion of human rights in the country.
- Prioritise and strengthen methods of emergency relief and service delivery that rely on local CSO/CBOs and ethnic service providers that have the ability and networks for local implementation of support programmes.
- Collaborate with local CBOs/CSOs to develop comprehensive supporting systems for survivors of human rights violations in the country.

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<sup>6</sup> KHRG, *Denied and Deprived: Local communities confronting the humanitarian crisis and protection challenges in Southeast Burma*, June 2022. Also: UN General Assembly, *Situation of human rights in Myanmar. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, A/78/527*, October 2023, para. 20