



## Statement on 2025 World Children's Day

November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

On this **World's Children Day**, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) raises the alarm about the systematic devastation inflicted upon children in Southeast Burma and across the country by armed actors. We urgently call upon the international community and all relevant stakeholders to recognize and address the grave human rights and humanitarian crisis in Burma and to take immediate and concrete action to cease the pervasive violence against civilians, especially children.

This protracted conflict, driven by the Burma Army's<sup>1</sup> notorious "four cuts" strategy, has systematically targeted civilian populations, undermining every element essential for children in Southeast Burma to live a dignified and healthy life. Children in locally-defined Karen State are subjected to a devastating range of human rights violations, including death and injury from airstrikes, drone attacks, shelling, and landmine or UXO explosions; arbitrary arrest, torture, killing, and enforced disappearance; sexual violence; forced labor and recruitment; forced displacement; denial of humanitarian aid, education, medical care, and other basic services; and profound psychosocial trauma caused by constant fear, loss, and instability. The Burma Army remains the primary perpetrator of these abuses.

KHRG's latest thematic report, "Stolen Childhoods", shares abuses documented between January 2024 and June 2025, further detailing the severe impacts on children. On November 19th, 2024, a Burma Army drone dropped two bombs directly onto a school in Kler Lwee Htoo District. This attack, occurring while students gathered for food, severely injured a 9-year-old and an 8-year-old girl, and destroyed the vital school building and community hall.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, on March 7th, 2024, Burma Army shelling struck a village in Moo Special Area in the middle of a wedding ceremony. The attack hit a family home, killing several relatives, including a 15-year-old boy, his eight-year-old cousin, their mother, aunt, and grandmother. His younger brother survived but lost his leg to amputation, and severe shoulder injuries left him unable to move his arm, resulting in a permanent disability.<sup>3</sup> Together, these attacks reveal a systematic assault on childhood itself, shattering families while eroding the possibility of a safe, dignified future for the next generation.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by Burma in 1991, making its vital protection rules and principles applicable for over three decades. Nevertheless, as "Stolen Childhoods" documents, omnipresent violations of children's rights persist. The Burma Army's actions represent a systematic rejection of International Human Rights Law, stripping children of their fundamental rights enshrined in the CRC, specifically denying them access to education, health, and a safe living environment. Compounding this, the targeted attacks on civilian objects

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Burma military, Burma Army, SAC, and junta are used interchangeably to describe Burma's armed forces. Villagers themselves commonly use Burma Army, Burmese soldiers, or alternatively the name adopted by the Burma military regime at the time.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), *Stolen Childhoods: Violations of children's rights, urgent needs, and local agency in rural Southeast Burma during the conflict* (November 2025) 18.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), *Stolen Childhoods: Violations of children's rights, urgent needs, and local agency in rural Southeast Burma during the conflict* (November 2025) 6.

like schools and healthcare facilities, and the killing and injuring of children, constitute flagrant breaches of International Humanitarian Law. These actions plainly violate the core principles of distinction and proportionality, failing to differentiate between civilian and military objectives. Furthermore, the recruitment of child soldiers by armed groups, mainly the Burma Army, directly contravenes Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. These grave findings, encompassing all six of the UN's Grave Violations against Children, also provide substantial evidence that these acts may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity under International Criminal Law.

On this World's Children Day, the voices of children in Southeast Burma demand to be heard. As a 17-year-old girl from Doo Tha Htoo District shared with KHRG, *"If we do not have access to education, we are like those who cannot see in front while walking."*<sup>4</sup> Her determination is echoed by a 16-year-old student from Dooطلا District who affirms, *"If we receive education, we will be able to teach the new generations. So, it is important for us."*<sup>5</sup> These words highlight the resilience, aspirations, and untapped potential of children living under constant threat, and remind us that every day of denied rights dims not only their future but the future of entire communities.

**KHRG urgently calls on the international community and all relevant stakeholders to end abuses, ensure accountability, and safeguard children's rights, so that their dreams may finally become reality.**

We demand urgent, concrete action to end impunity, deliver justice, and ensure comprehensive support through:

- **Prioritized Humanitarian Lifelines:** Critically increase flexible cross-border funding for children's education, health, nutrition, and psychosocial services, ensuring it reaches the most vulnerable populations via local community-based organizations.
- **Protection of Children and Civilian Spaces:** Demand all armed groups to strictly end child recruitment, provide safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, and refrain from using schools, health facilities, or religious sites for military purposes. Uphold the best interests of the child above all other considerations.
- **Enforcement of International Law:** Urgently support and strengthen international justice mechanisms to ensure thorough, child-sensitive investigations and the collection of admissible evidence for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations committed by all armed actors in Burma. Impose and rigorously enforce comprehensive arms and aviation fuel embargoes, as well as targeted sanctions, specifically against the military junta, to prevent further atrocities. Ensure that all measures align with the CRC, prioritizing the protection, rights, and best interests of children.

We urgently call on all stakeholders to read the full report: <https://shorturl.at/09SSm>

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), *Stolen Childhoods: Violations of children's rights, urgent needs, and local agency in rural Southeast Burma during the conflict* (November 2025) 86.

<sup>5</sup> Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), *Stolen Childhoods: Violations of children's rights, urgent needs, and local agency in rural Southeast Burma during the conflict* (November 2025) 87.