



Karen Women Organization
E-mail: kwocentral@gmail.com Website: www.karenwomen.org

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World Refugee Day

"Even I Am a Refugee, Listen to My Voice"

The Karen Women Organization (KWO) welcomes another World Refugee Day. For this year the KWO theme is "Even I Am a Refugee, Listen to My Voice". This theme was chosen by refugee women participants in a KWO training on Refugee Rights and Repatriation held this month. On 20th June each year, the world is reminded of the plight of refugees. They are encouraged to maintain or increase the humanitarian aid for refugees so that refugees can try to live in dignity. It is also a day to give thanks to those countries, like Thailand, that host refugees. We are women refugees and we want to recognize this day in a formal way because we have been advocates for change in our refugee community for many years. We know there is a lot to do, especially now as we notice some new favorite words being used by the Burmese Thein Sein Government and some International agencies... "Refugee Repatriation". We want to be sure that even refugees are listened to.

On 17th June, 2012, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi finally was able to go to Norway freely and give a speech of acceptance for the Nobel Peace Prize which she was awarded in 1991. During her speech she explained that she had travelled to visit a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border recently, where there have been serious funding cuts resulting in reduced food rations and services. "I met dedicated people who were striving daily to make the lives of the inmates as free from hardship as possible. They spoke of their concern over 'donor fatigue,' which could also translate as 'compassion fatigue.' 'Donor fatigue' expresses itself precisely in the reduction of funding. 'Compassion fatigue' expresses itself less obviously in the reduction of concern. One is the consequence of the other. Can we afford to indulge in compassion fatigue? Is the cost of meeting the needs of refugees greater than the cost that would be consequent on turning an indifferent, if not a blind, eye on their suffering? I appeal to donors the world over to fulfill the needs of these people who are in search, often it must seem to them a vain search, of refuge."

Today the KWO Secretary, Dah Eh Kler said, "If we have a choice, no body wants to become a refugee. I still remember the day when I was forced to leave my village. I did not plan to do it but the Burmese army entered our village and started shooting, so we all had to run for our lives. None of us planned to leave our country and become refugees in another country. So now if there is a possibility for us to return to our homes, we want to have a real test of freedom and to be fully included in planning our return. In the past I have said... Nothing about us, without us. But today I want to say "Nothing About Refugees Without Refugees".

Although there is a lot of media attention on the current Peace Process in Burma there is little change on the ground for the ethnic peoples. In fact, we have seen more human rights violations, land confiscations, increased Burmese military presence, forced labor, killing and continued fighting in some areas. It is not safe for refugees to return to Burma. It is not safe for refugees to be excluded from discussions and planning about their return. There is a lot of fear and not enough freedom.

On this World Refugee Day, as women and as refugees, KWO would like to call on all those sitting at the tables and making decisions about the lives of refugees to listen to our voices, and to genuinely include us. We want to see refugee representatives at every table. We want to see women representatives at every table. Refugee return will not be safe unless we are listened to every step of the way.

Contact:

Naw Blooming Night Zan - +66 885455746
Naw Ta Mla Saw - + 66 810266738