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Karen Grassroots Women Network
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The Karen Grassroots Women's Network Calls for the Immediate & Unconditional Release of Karen Activists

20 February 2020: The Karen Grassroots Women's Network (KGWN) strongly condemns the arrest of renowned Karen human-rights activist, Naw Ohn Hla, and human rights defenders U Maung Oo, U Nge (aka) U Hsan Hlaing and Daw Sanda Myint, who have been unjustly charged under the Peaceful Assembly Act 19/20 and sentenced to one-month in prison. In April 2019, Naw Ohn Hla joined protests with residents of the Shwe Mya Sandi Housing Project after occupants lost their land and temporary houses. Police records from the protest show that Naw Ohn Hla's name was not included in the request letter and the authorities have since justified the basis of her arrest on this information.

Her arrest and subsequent sentencing speak volumes to the extent at which the National League for Democracy-led government is willing to go to suppress and silence activists. Naw Ohn Hla has been a steady voice for decades in the human rights movement for recognition and equality for Karen people. Despite being jailed multiple times for lending her voice to the various causes she stands for, Naw Ohn Hla remains steadfast and unwavering in her activism.

In September 2019, Naw Ohn Hla along with two fellow Karen activists were arrested and sentenced to 15-days in prison for their efforts in organizing a ceremony commemorating the 69th anniversary of Karen Martyrs' Day. When Yangon's Region Chief Minister told organizers that they couldn't use the word 'martyr' - the location was changed and the event took place without censorship. Upon their release from prison, hundreds of Karen people greeted them with cheers and calls for equal rights for ethnic people.

For decades, ethnic people have been forced to stifle our cultures and traditions against the backdrop of Burmanization practices that continue to deliberately undermine our Karen identity. The KGWN does not accept these attempts to delegitimize our identity and we stand tall with Naw Ohn Hla and activists who are also using their voices to protect their ethnic history.

We reinforce urgent calls for her immediate and unconditional release. We are deeply saddened by her arrest, but mostly we are disappointed that the civilian-government continues to turn a blind-eye to the injustices taking place in our country in the name of democracy. Our Karen people deserve better and so we will keep demanding it.

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