



The Karen Women's Organization Condemns Burma Army's Indiscriminate Firing on Villagers in Rakhine and Chin States

27 March 2020: The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) calls for the immediate withdrawal of the Burmese Army from civilian areas in Rakhine and Chin States, based on the deteriorating human rights situation and the reopening of internet access. The rise in attacks on civilians shows a blatant disregard for the lives of innocent villagers and rule of law. The current Covid-19 pandemic makes this all the more urgent. We cannot restrict information nor force more civilians to flee leaving them even more vulnerable.

Escalating tensions between the Burma Army and the Arakan Army (AA) have contributed to an increase in human rights abuses against local communities caught in the crossfire. Earlier this month, the Burma Army fired on four villages in Paletwa Township. Indiscriminate airstrikes killed 21 and injured 24. Days later, the Burma Army planes fired on Meik Sawa village in southern Chin State, killing 11 civilians and injuring six, including a seven year old child. The government-imposed Internet shutdown in several townships in Rakhine and Chin States creates a lack of access to information limiting humanitarian support and allowing the Burma Army to evade accountability.

Nearly 65,000 people have been displaced in 148 sites in Rakhine and Chin States, where this month alone, at least 167 civilians were killed or injured as hundreds continue to flee. Health care workers have struggled to treat the influx of patients who need life-saving support. The Burma Army has increased the check-points on the way to hospitals causing many not to pass through to transport their loved ones because they are simply afraid.

Everywhere we look, whether the cases are in Rakhine or Karen State, civilians are being unfairly targeted by the Burma Army. In our Karen State, communities continue to live in fear of the Burma Army. Nearly 3000 civilians, including 417 children under 5 years old, were forcibly displaced when fighting erupted in the KNU-administered Mutraw District, over the controversial road expansion by the Burma Army. Many of those displaced remain in hiding, fearful of return.

KWO calls for the immediate withdrawal of the Burma Army from civilian areas in Rakhine and Chin States and for the Internet blackout to be lifted. We also call for the full cooperation of the Burmese Government and the Burmese Army with the International, Impartial and Independent mechanism into crimes committed by the Burma Army. It is only through documentation and the exposing of the full facts that perpetrators can be held accountable. The international community must end their cooperation with military-owned companies immediately and financial sanctions must be enacted. The world must make clear that relations with corrupt officials will not be tolerated.

The Karen Women's Organization is deeply worried that more of our Chin and Rakhine sisters and their children will be hurt, killed, or forced to flee. We know their fear. We stand with them and hope for a better path forward for all of us to live in peace and freedom.

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