



The Karen Women's Organization Calls for Inclusion & Equal Representation On International Day of Peace

21 September 2020: The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) welcomes International Peace Day by calling for genuine and inclusive peace in Burma. This year's theme, 'Shaping Peace Together,' recognizes the importance of equal access and participation in all matters related to peace. Yet in Burma, women have been unfairly sidelined from participating and are seriously underrepresented in the peace process, despite being deeply affected by decades of internal civil war. Their perspective is invaluable in building peace and yet they are underrepresented in the talks and negotiations.

The Burmese government has insisted that the peace process is advancing and that they are committed to it. However, KWO has witnessed the steady increase of violence in conflict torn Rakhine state where the Burma Army has refused to extend their unilateral nationwide truce or lift the Internet shutdown in 8 of the townships. In the areas where the ceasefire extends, such as Shan and Karen state, there is still regular fighting and villagers are still living in fear. The increase in deaths of children by artillery shelling and indiscriminate shooting is further proof that nothing good comes from war. If the Burma Army is truly sincere in their commitments to peace, they will immediately cease the attacks on civilians.

As a woman led organization, KWO is a strong advocate of female leadership and representation in all sectors of policy making decisions. Women's participation means we are able to contribute to discussions on concrete solutions that are reflective of our experiences. In our community, peace means that everyone has enough food in a place where we can live and work and be free from harm with dignity in the refugee camps and inside Karen state. We should not have to worry about what will happen tomorrow or to our children. Diversity in Burma should be celebrated and bring us closer together, rather than be a reason for unrest and violence. As long as our community is living in fear and hiding while being deprived of a future, it is clear this is not peace.

Peace cannot be achieved without justice. In an effort to create peace in Burma, there must be inclusiveness and representation of key stakeholders from different backgrounds and gender. Peace in our country is long overdue and it will not be possible until there is mutual respect and equal treatment for all.

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