



The Karen Women's Organization Condemns Escalating Violence in Karen State and Calls for An Urgent Response by the International Community

20 January 2021: The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) condemns the latest attacks by the Burma Army in northern Karen State against innocent civilians. These merciless encroachments of villager rights must end. They warrant an immediate humanitarian response by the international community. Karen civilians are being killed and injured and are being forced to flee so the Burmese military can build a road.

At this point we know the recent artillery fire by the Burma Army has led to the displacement of nearly 4000 civilians, the death of a village chief, the serious injury of an 11-year-old boy and the injury of a villager tending to his livestock who was struck in the head and thighs by heavy mortars amid clashes. The attacks continue as we write this. These acts of political warfare by the Burma Army are shameful and demand redress. The Burma Army is trying to force the building of a military road through villagers' traditional land claiming it's for their benefit while silencing voices of dissent. Our communities have suffered abuse for decades. Despite being the architects of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the Burma Army continues to relentlessly abuse and violate the terms. The series of attacks shows that they are not genuinely committed to peace and unity in the country.

The lack of positive improvements through the deadlocked peace process calls into question the possibility of any meaningful change. The highly exclusive meetings during the peace talks have discounted civilian input, forcing key stakeholders to walk away from negotiations several times. The insufficient monitoring process and lack of accountability for violations of the NCA must be addressed. How can the process move forward if already existing agreements are ignored with impunity?

The military leadership has used Karen people's land to build roads and for construction projects. This has fueled widespread displacement. These actions are simply a political tool used by the Burma Army to steal land, create fear and to exert control over the local population.

A growing movement of Karen civilians are refusing to tolerate the continued violence by the Burmese military. KWO supports the call by the over 10,000 villagers protesting the Burma Army's presence and demanding the immediate withdrawal of Burma Army bases. Villagers see the construction of the road as provoking fighting, which endangers their lives and livelihoods. They are against any investment in their areas before a political solution is reached. Community-based organizations, including KWO, support their calls for an immediate end to all development projects.

The current bombing of civilians is a violation of international law and the international community has an obligation to hold the Burma Army accountable for their crimes against our indigenous community. Further, funding for the peace process should be stopped until the Burmese Army's actions are consistent with the NCA. The National League for Democracy led

government must take responsibility for the actions of the Burma Army. We call on the Burma Army to stop fighting and to immediately withdraw all troops. It is time for real peace.

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