



# WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY EFFORTS: 2021-2025

GRASSROOTS WOMEN IN  
SOUTHEAST BURMA  
IMPLEMENTING THE UNSC  
RESOLUTIONS

THE KAREN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

March 8 2026

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# WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

**KWO has more than 70,000 Karen women members spread throughout our ancestral land in Southeast Burma.**

**The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda**—anchored in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions—has four main pillars: **participation, protection, prevention, and relief & recovery**. KWO works on all 4 pillars. KWO has more than 70,000 Karen women members spread throughout our ancestral land in Southeast Burma (Kawthoolei) and in the 7 Karen refugee camps in Thailand.

All of our work is grounded in our members and based on the three anchors of our efforts: **capacity building, service and advocacy**. Our work on the WPS agenda reflects that perspective and base.



# INTRODUCTION

Decades of violence under corrupt military rulers in Burma have hindered progress and prosperity for women. Since the military coup on 1 February 2021, concerns about women's safety have grown as the Burma Army intensifies attacks that destroy women's peace and security.

Over the last five years, the junta has become increasingly bold in targeting even the most vulnerable communities, including those living in temporary shelters and camps for internally displaced people, as well as hospitals, schools, and religious monuments. Women have not been spared in the junta's spree of deadly assaults, which has tried to deprive them of their humanity. The gendered impacts of the military's war have tested the resilience of women and girls, as countless daily acts of violence and attacks leave them increasingly unprotected and at greater risk.

Existing inequalities have worsened as women continue to suffer, as wars heighten women's vulnerability to sexual violence and exploitation. Social services under the decades of military rule have failed to develop meaningful protection against gender-based violence. Thousands in Burma have been killed, injured, arrested, and tortured. The economy has fallen apart, leaving millions in severe food insecurity. **The ongoing crisis has now displaced more than 3.5 million people nationwide, including over 1 million in Kawthoolei.**



The futures of young women and girls are increasingly at risk as acts of sexual violence committed by the junta and armed actors continue with impunity. Military junta soldiers have been shielded and protected by the 2008 Constitution, making pathways to accountability and justice for survivors nearly impossible. Those who have pursued justice in the past are met with shame and stigma at best and often with intimidation, threat and retaliation. The system seeks to blame them, rather than the perpetrator. Now, women do not dare pursue their cases in the Burmese courts as the junta continues to weaponize the rule of law, leaving even fewer options to ensure their voices are heard and justice is secured.

In this context of conflict, oppression, and underdevelopment, KWO has worked on women's peace and security issues for more than 40 years. We have earned our community's trust by maintaining transparency and accountability. We have more than 70,000 Karen women members who form the base, leadership and staff of our organization. KWO focuses on building Karen women's capacity to serve their community and address their own challenges.

The recipients of service develop the skills to provide those services through KWO or other means, and are then equipped and trained to advocate for themselves and their community. We are dedicated to ensuring that women are seen as peacebuilders and rights-holders, not just as victims of war.



## 01. PARTICIPATION

**What WPS means by participation:** Ensuring women's equal involvement in decision-making, leadership, and peace processes.

KWO works with our members and community to build women's leadership by expanding our capacity as leaders, advocating for our engagement with indigenous governance structures, village leadership, and INGO development projects, and working to establish policies and guidelines that guarantee equal access to influence in our future. Being able to influence our future requires political leadership, policy development and implementation, development projects, community planning and many other decision-making roles and forums.

### Leadership development for Karen women and girls

KWO trains young women from both refugee camps and IDP communities through the Karen Young Women's Leadership School (KYWLS). This is a one-year residential course begun in 2001 that covers gender, women's rights, human rights, leadership, democracy, and federalism.

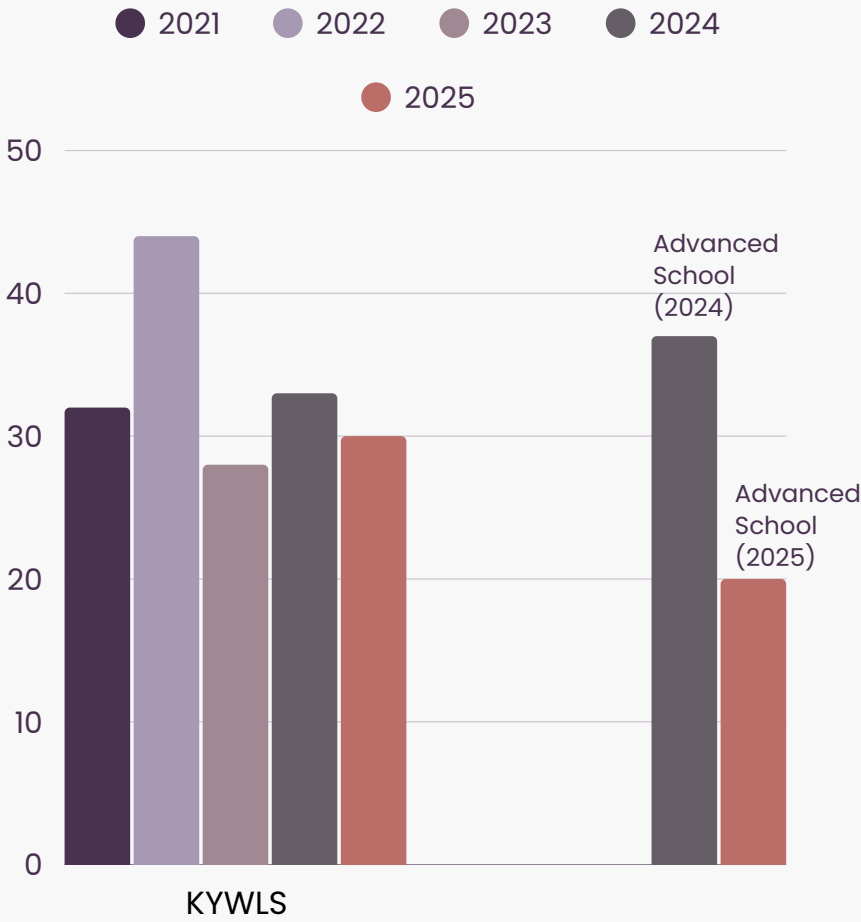
**From 2021 to 2025, 137 young women graduated and are now serving as KWO leaders as well as community leaders, while 30 more are currently in school. We also organized three advanced political training courses for experienced KWO leaders.**



While the KYWLS focuses on preparing young women to become community leaders, these advanced courses equip women to engage more deeply in political processes within Karen politics and Burma as a whole. So far, almost **60 women** have participated in these 3-month-long advanced trainings.

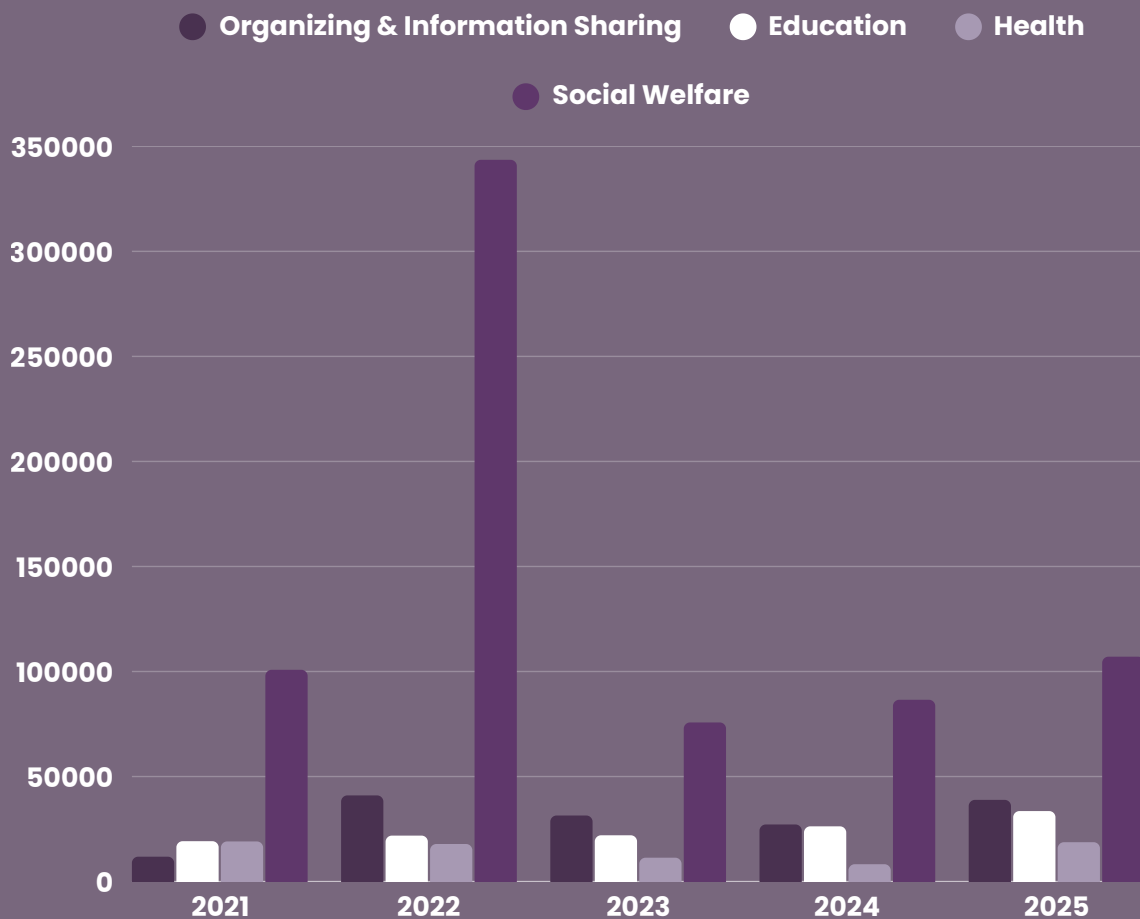
### Women's Leadership Residential Course Participation

Total (2021-25)-224



Finally, we have a large capacity building program which works primarily with our 1000 leaders and staff to **increase skills and knowledge to engage more fully** in providing the services we deliver and participating as women leaders in our community. This extensive capacity-building program has empowered Karen women to provide the services and advocacy in our four program areas. We have provided services to over 1 million Karen people since the coup.

### KWO Beneficiares by Program area and Year Beneficiaries Average 68% Annually



- **Active participation in political processes and advocacy networks**

Before the coup in 2021, KWO helped form the **Karen Grassroots Women’s Network**, which continues to operate. The goal of the network has been to increase the voice and leadership of Karen women in our community.

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The military attacks on our community, including air bombing, shelling, and roadblocks, have enormously increased risks to personal security, but despite that risk, we worked with women from diverse backgrounds to organize the **Kawthoolei Women's Seminar to discuss the role of women in our community**, bringing together more than 130 women from across Kawthoolei for three days in 2025.

Participants discussed gender based violence, women's ability to be heard on important village and district issues, and women's representation in indigenous departments providing service in areas controlled by the Karen National Union. We developed collective strategies and advocated for women's representation in the future Kawthoolei government.

The Karen Grassroots Women's Network was revitalized through this seminar. KWO and the Network created a group of women to serve as the main contact points for the Kawthoolei constitution. KWO is currently fundraising to support those women's efforts to meet with and train women locally across Kawthoolei so more can engage in the work of building a democracy in Burma.





While this work is done by the network, KWO raises the funds and is the lead organization moving the effort forward. This network will continue to work together to ensure women's engagement in ongoing consultations and other political processes leading to a federal democratic government from the bottom up.

KWO supports the **Karen National Union (KNU)**, our indigenous leadership, by mentoring, training, and organizing workshops for women already serving in various roles within KNU but who have had limited opportunities to grow as leaders. Through a series of forums and training sessions, for example, **93 women** built their knowledge of KNU policies, human rights, democracy, and federalism, helping them prepare to engage in future KNU congresses. KWO has raised funds to support three Karen women judges, including the Chief Justice, by providing training and building the capacity of other women judges within the KNU judicial system. These three Karen women leaders serve at the top of the KNU judicial system.

Additionally, we jointly sponsored a training session for **61 women police officers and judges** to ensure that newly recruited women police officers and judges had in-depth knowledge of their roles, women's rights, gender-based violence, and other legal issues they will have to address in their work.

- **Shaping governance and constitutional processes**

KWO is actively participating in the **drafting of the future Kawthoolei constitution**. We have organized consultations with Karen women and provided recommendations to ensure the constitution includes strong protections for social security, women's rights, and guarantees women's political representation. The drafting committee has received our recommendations, and discussions are ongoing about their inclusion.

We also organized women from refugee camps, districts and our standing committee to review the **Kawthoolei Charter**, a foundational document proposed by the Karen National Union, where we submitted our input and demanded greater women's representation.



The Kawthoolei Charter is intended to delineate the shared vision, values, and principles of the people of Kawthoolei. It sets out guidance for governance, leadership, rights, responsibilities, and conduct for a future just, inclusive, and democratic society. KWO continues to hold internal consultations and submit comments and recommendations to ensure that women's rights, gender equality, and inclusive participation are properly reflected in the Charter. Although many of our suggestions have not yet been included, we remain committed to continued engagement and advocacy to ensure that women's perspectives and gender equality are fully recognized, not just in the Charter but in a future government.



- ***Recognizing and promoting women leaders***

KWO continues to highlight the achievements of Karen women leaders. Since 2021, we have given recognition and **honorary awards to 26 women**, raising their profiles in the community.

During KWO's **40th anniversary celebration**, we published a book that highlights the **profiles of 40 Karen women leaders** to showcase their leadership capacity, inspire future generations, and demonstrate the significant positive impact women leaders bring to their communities. We also published the chronicle of the building of KWO by community women working to increase their role and capacity in solving problems they face and advocating for themselves and their communities. Both these books will serve as a part of the curriculum for training new generations of Karen women and girls.

## 02. PROTECTION

**What WPS means by protection:** Safeguarding women and girls from sexual violence, exploitation, displacement-related abuse, and ensuring rights during and after conflict.

### **Women's Protection and Safe Houses:**

KWO began running safe houses for women who have suffered from gender-based violence in 2001. We have cared for and protected women for our entire 40-year history. These safe houses run in the refugee camps and in conflict-affected communities. We also provide case management, psycho-social support, women survivor exchanges and a wide variety of services and protection. While this work is ongoing and has expanded, in recent years, we have spent additional time in IDP camps working to ensure domestic violence is addressed and women are protected. We are the only comprehensive program working in the refugee camps and in Kawthoolei on these issues.

In the course of this work, we have also worked with other stakeholders to develop automated community mechanisms to respond to gender-based violence, access-to-justice systems, and, as comprehensively as possible, despite the conflict in Kawthoolei and the limited access to the Thai justice system in the refugee camps. This work has been done in Thailand, within the refugee camps, and in Kawthoolei, where we have drafted laws and trained policymakers on these issues. We conduct a wide range of community awareness and advocacy activities.

Advocacy activities regularly address sexual and gender-based violence, including the 16 Days of Activism campaign, and focus on establishing safe spaces and services for women and children. We have over 9,000 Karen participants in the 16 Days of Activism annually, during which public education and awareness are our focus. We continuously work to promote justice mechanisms that hold perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses.

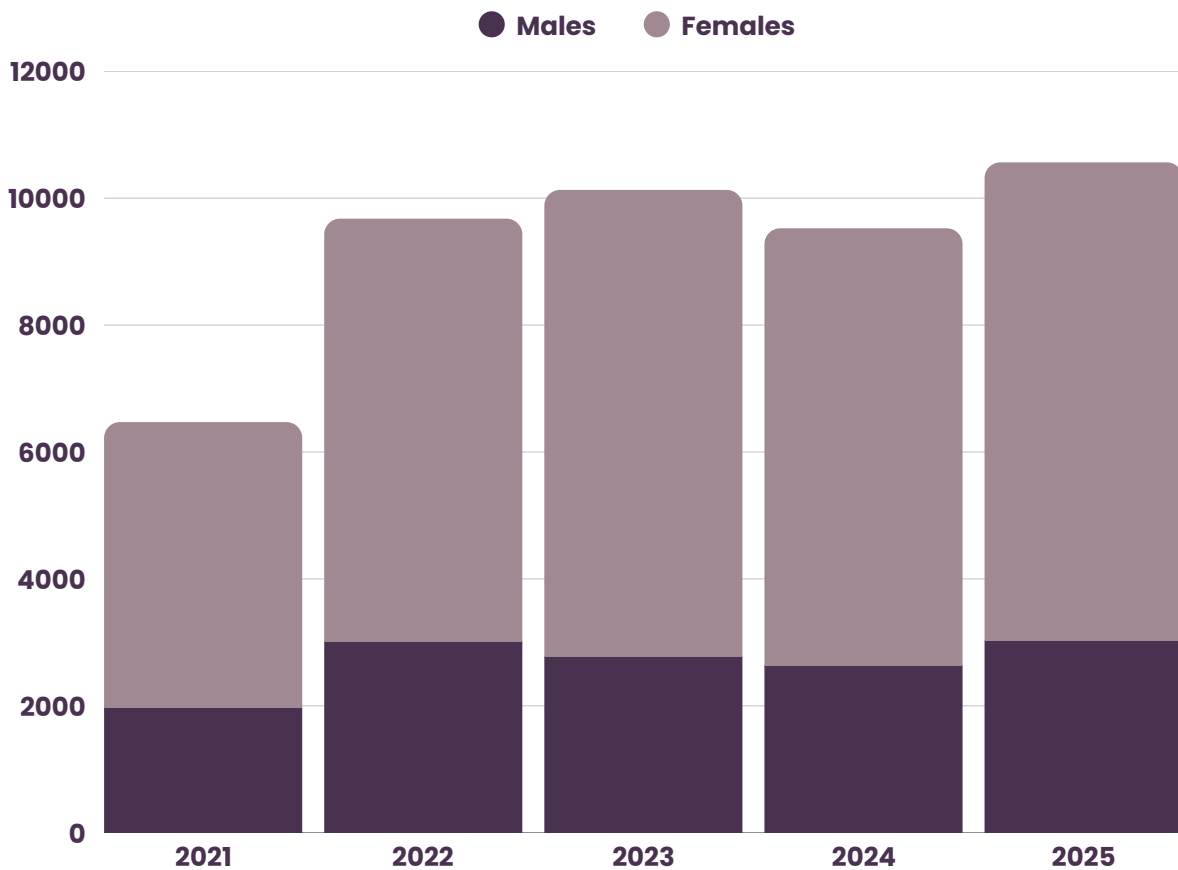




*Advocacy activities regularly address sexual and gender-based violence, including the 16 Days of Activism campaign, and focus on establishing safe spaces and services for women and children.*



### 16 Days of Action Against Gender Based Violence



- **Access to work:** KWO has long advocated for refugees to have legal access to work in Thailand. We believe this is the only long-term solution for refugees who have been in Thailand for as long as 40 years. In 2025, Thailand began granting this permission. We are currently working to establish expanded rights and mechanisms for addressing problems and abuse, and to expand training for women refugees. This will be particularly important as we have an increasing number of widows and women who are responsible for their families due to conflict, the draft by the Burmese military, along with deaths and injuries.

### **03. PREVENTION**

**What WPS means by prevention:** Preventing conflict and violence through women's leadership, addressing root causes, and promoting peace and justice.

Women have been exposed to the military junta's violence on a near-daily basis. The junta has escalated attacks in ethnic regions, targeting civilians, including Kawthoolei, with frequent indiscriminate firing, aerial and ground strikes. People are forced to flee as their villages are destroyed by burning, shelling, or bombing by the Burma Army. The junta's violence that has engulfed the country since the attempted coup has violated the fundamental human rights of the Karen people and endangered thousands of lives.

Prevention requires a coordinated and strategic effort to reduce conflict and violence through women's leadership, addressing root causes, and promoting peace and justice. KWO aims to achieve this through peace education, awareness campaigns, and community organizing to challenge military rule, discrimination, and human rights violations.

**Community awareness and documentation:** KWO has undertaken a wide range of initiatives over the past 5 years. Prior to the coup, we conducted training in peacebuilding, negotiation, democracy, and advocacy. KWO has been documenting human rights violations for decades. Since the coup, we have been submitting verified information/cases to relevant justice and accountability mechanisms, and we have expanded women's understanding of the international mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable for these crimes. We have also focused on child protection awareness.



Working in IDP camps and school dormitories to ensure children know their rights and where to go if they experience any problems. We know that during times of war and displacement, children are particularly vulnerable, and thus we have created systems to minimize that vulnerability.

Documenting human rights violations, including those affecting women and children, is vital to advocacy efforts to prevent injustice. We regularly receive reports of human rights violations from the ground. Human rights violations are widespread across all seven districts in Kawthoolei; however, the fear of reporting, security risks, and communication limitations mean that not all cases are recorded or reported. As a result, the actual numbers are likely much higher.

We focus particularly on human rights violations against women, for example, in the first half of 2021, there were 17 incidents of arbitrary arrests, during which six women were arrested, tortured, and then forced to porter for the Burma Army. They were subsequently used as human shields.

# KWO UPDATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE BURMA ARMY IN KAWTHOOLEI.

- KWO has been keeping a record of human rights violations (HRVs) perpetrated by the Burma Army (BA) in Karen areas against our people. Here we share data from recent HRV reports received by the Karen Women's Organization.

2021- 2025

## 01 Indiscriminate Firing & Shelling

- 3,480 incidents of indiscriminate shelling
- 44,688 shots were fired from small guns or artillery, and 12,907 missiles were fired
- 2,105 shells landed in Karen villages
- 378 times shells landed in livelihood areas (including 59 farms)

## 03 Arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, use of civilians as human shields & navigators

- 275 incidents of arbitrary arrest with a total of 1,408 victims

## 05 Intimidation and Violent Threats Against Civilians

- 6,972 incidents

(\*Includes all related attacks against civilians, eg, Burma Army soldiers use guns, knives, violence, and abuse, to frighten and force villagers. Also, planes, drones, and helicopters are flying over villages and planting landmines around them.)

## 07 Airstrikes (by Burma Army planes, jets, and helicopters on civilian targets)

- 4,801 Airstrikes (267 killed and 630 injured as a result)

## 09 Routes Blocked by the Burma Army

- 195 incidents

(Not just a checkpoint. No one can pass during a given period. BA reinforces soldiers, bringing in supplies. Villagers cannot move around.)

## 02 Killing & Serious Injury

- 1,271 deaths (514 females, 762 males).
- 2,913 Victims with serious injury (1,206 females, 1,715 males)

**\*The victims were injured mainly by indiscriminate firing and shelling, air strikes and from landmines planted by the Burma Army.**

## 04 Looting/ theft/ damage to property (house, food, animals, land etc)

- There were 97 incidents with at least 563 victims.

**\*BA soldiers enter a village and invade homes, steal or damage property, and steal or kill animals.**

## 06 Forced Portering & Forced Labour

- 108 incidents and a total 1,011 of victims

(\*BA soldiers in a nearby force force villagers to work for them and carry things for them. Sometimes for several days)

## 08 Homes and Huts Burned & Destroyed by soldiers, or by shelling

- At least 3,611 homes were burnt down by BA soldiers, deliberately setting fires.
- Plus, 1,742 homes and public buildings were burnt down or damaged from shelling and airstrikes.
- In addition, 90 farms were also destroyed, including rice fields

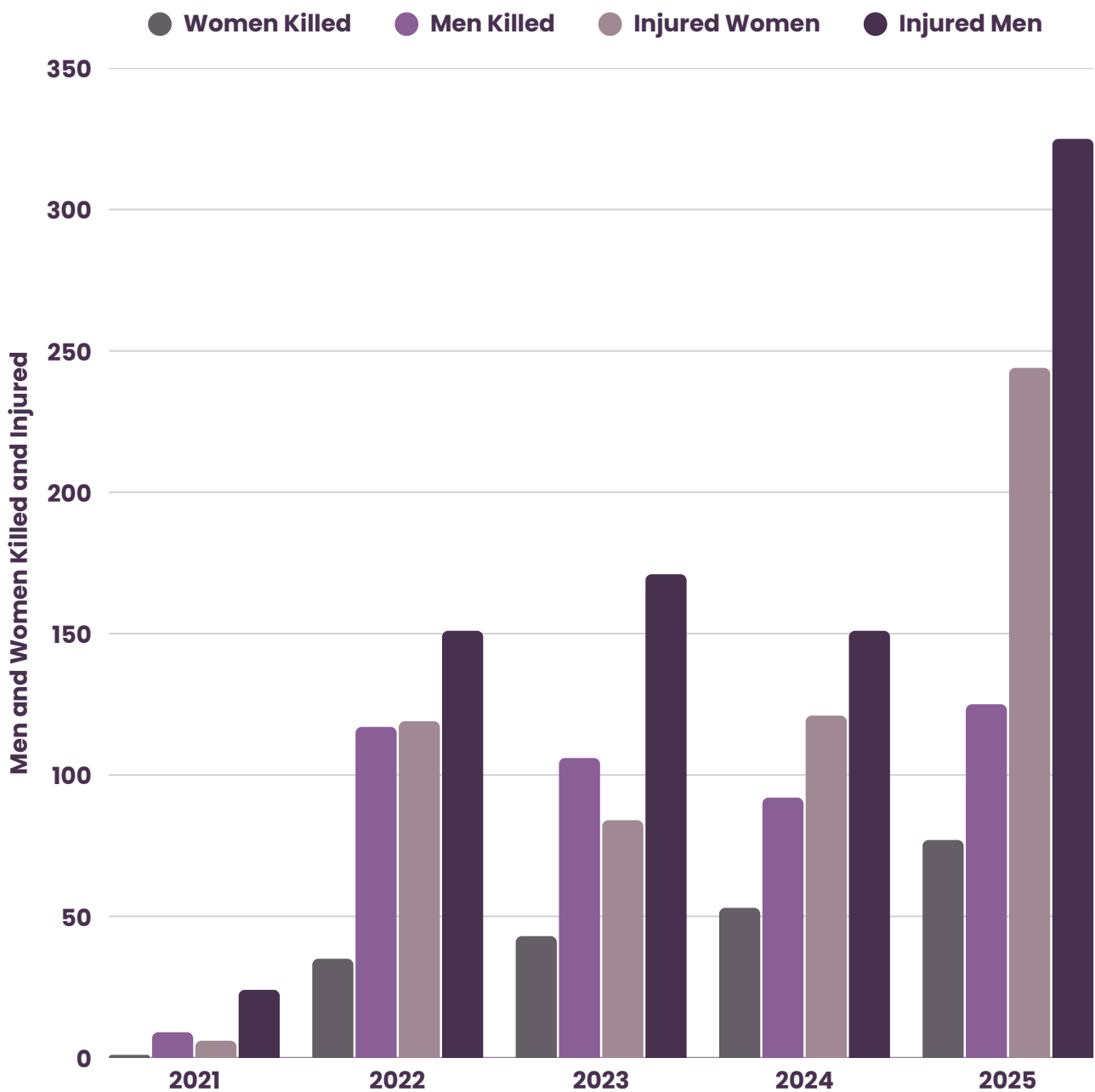
## 10 Number of IDPs in SE Burma

- **Total: 1,772,870**

- These are the human rights violation reports that we received regularly from the field. The HRVs are widespread in all seven districts in Karen State (Kawthoolei), but due to fear of reporting, security risks, and communication limitations, not all cases are documented. Therefore, the numbers are likely much higher than this.

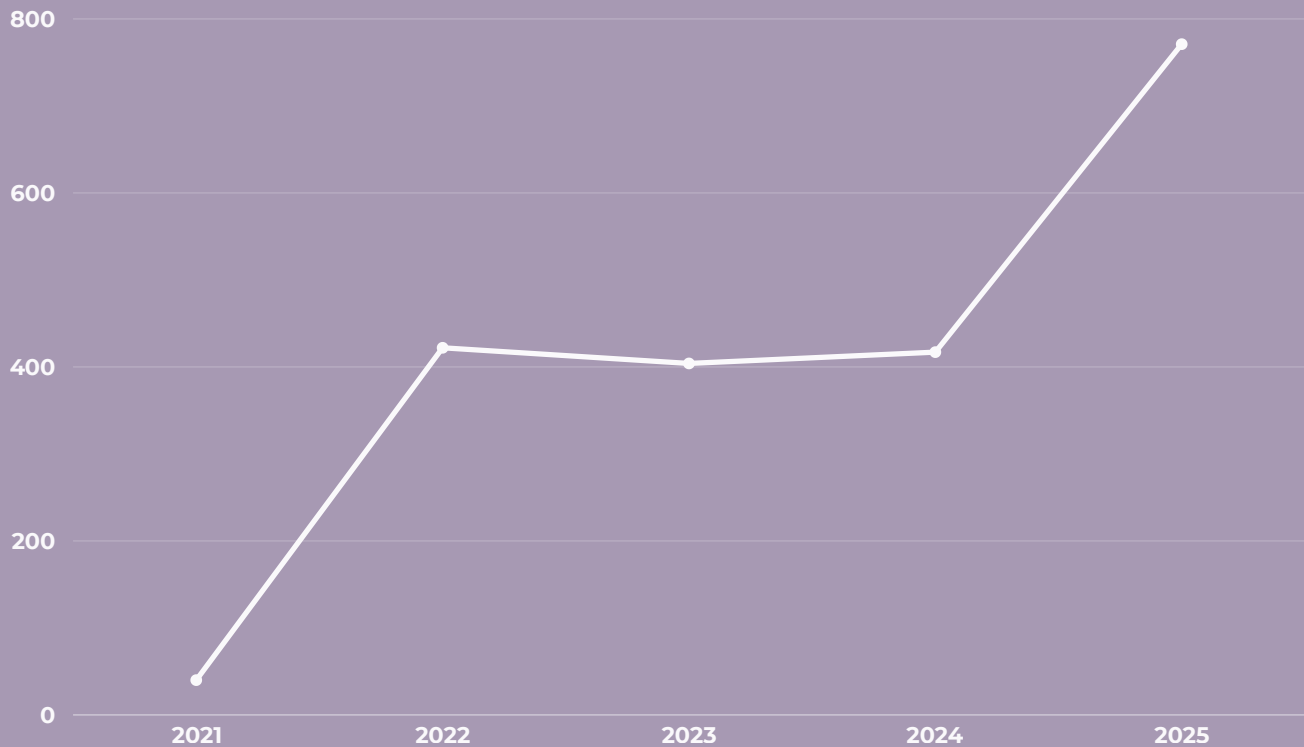
**International Advocacy:** KWO has also advocated for international efforts to weaken the illegal junta and bring peace to our country. We have spoken at the United Nations, met with diplomats, provided information from the ground, and worked with allies to document what is happening here. We helped form the Karen Peace Support Network mentioned above, which produces reports and coordinates this advocacy.

## People Injured or Killed by Conflict in Kawthoolei 2021-2025



**KWO has also advocated for international efforts to weaken the illegal junta and bring peace to our country.**

## People Injured or Killed by Conflict in Kawthoolei 2021-2025



- **Peace Education and Ending Discrimination:** KWO does peace education activities at our residential schools and in our capacity-building programs. We work to ensure women have the skills they need to bridge conflict within our community and across ethnic groups. We are deeply committed to a peaceful, multi-ethnic Burma and have supported numerous efforts to foster collaboration among ethnic groups. We worked with others to build the Women's League of Burma (WLB), which works with 12 different ethnic women's organizations to bring peace to Burma. KWO has provided full-time leadership, technical support and ongoing institutional and leadership strengthening of the WLB.
- **Kawthoolei Law:** KWO has also worked to amend Kawthoolei's criminal law to ensure that both women and children are adequately protected.

***KWO's promotion of peace education and advocacy reflects its commitment to fostering dialogue and building solidarity among ethnic communities across the country and beyond. Advocates participate in ASEAN, UN, and international forums to oppose ongoing violence by the military junta.***

## 04. RELIEF AND RECOVERY

**What WPS means by relief and recovery:** Ensuring women's needs and priorities shape humanitarian response, displacement solutions, and post-conflict rebuilding.

**Relief efforts:** KWO is part of a Karen community network which provides emergency support to IDPs who are not being reached by regular international humanitarian aid efforts, which are being controlled and diverted by the junta. This network has on-the-ground staff who are part of the communities and collaborate with village heads and other leaders.

Women face enormous challenges as the weight of war spills into households, where they are often left to lead in protecting and providing for their families, defying traditional gender roles. Amid the backdrop of bullets and bombs, women continue to assert themselves through acts of courage in uncertain times, sharing their skills and experience in various anti-junta, relief, advocacy, and other civil society-building efforts. Such actions carry significant personal risks for themselves and their loved ones.

The impacts of the conflict are felt more intensely by women and children who bear the burden of the junta's attacks. The war has forced at least 7.8 million children out of school, dropping enrollment rates by 80% in certain parts of the country.<sup>1</sup> Four out of every five townships in Burma have been impacted by the violence.

<sup>1</sup> Education Crisis in Myanmar: A Surge in Out-of-School Children Amidst Pandemic and Conflict, Children of the Mekong





KWO has been one of the most dependable partners in delivering life-saving humanitarian relief in Kawthoolei. We have provided food, shelter, and health support in refugee camps and IDP areas, and supported the packaging and distribution of baby, maternal, and traditional birth assistant kits.

KWO has ensured shelter with tarpaulins for displaced people, along with dried food, women's hygiene kits, solar lights, and other essential support for newly displaced people. In the face of climate change, including flooding and earthquakes, KWO has also provided services and assistance to those affected.

***Livelihood and Women's Voice:*** Additional challenges faced by women and girls are the lack of livelihood opportunities, which have pushed families further into irreversible cycles of poverty. Women are the primary caregivers in many households, and since the coup, family members' needs have increased. Women also provide care for injured family members. If a woman is injured or killed, the children and vulnerable individuals she cares for lose their protection and support.

KWO works with our over 70,000 Karen women members, who are present across every corner of our community, including many who are refugees and IDPs, to identify the needs of women in our community. We regularly travel throughout the community, meeting and discussing issues with small and large gatherings of women. Livelihood and skills training are tailored to meet the needs of displaced women, including sewing, weaving, leadership, small business, computer training, and soap-making. Psycho-social support and community healing initiatives have been introduced to ensure women's perspectives are included in recovery and long-term development planning.

Year	Number of IDPs in Kawthoolei
2021	167,435
2022	600,000
2023	750,000
2024	1,005,435
2025	1,219,092

Year	IDPs Benefiting from KWO's Emergency Assistance
2021	71,695
2022	142,528
2023	33,361
2024	81,248
2025	54,176



# Recommendations

- International governments and INGOs should increase funding of local women's groups who are building democracy and peace through grassroots engagement and capacity building. These two complementary methods are essential to building meaningful peace and the necessary civil society. KWO and other women's organizations are a vital part of civil society and can serve as a foundation for peace and security if supported and strengthened. We are also an important part of advocacy in ongoing conflicts.
- There is no meaningful road to peace through the illegal Burmese Junta. International governments must increase pressure to force the Junta to step aside and allow a new future for Burma.
  - Apply military pressure: do not sell or allow weapons or fuel to be sold to the Burma Army for their planes, which are used to drop bombs on innocent civilians.
  - Apply diplomatic pressure: do not recognize the military junta or their sham governments.
  - Apply economic pressure: don't do business with the Burma Army; instead, apply targeted sanctions against them. There must be no investment or business dealings with the military junta.
  - Seek accountability and justice for victims: this includes, but is not limited to, supporting The Gambia's case against Burma at the International Court of Justice and referring the Burmese military to the International Criminal Court.
- Increase cross-border support and aid through community-based organizations and existing structures, for IDPs and conflict-affected populations most in need.

# Recommendations

- Ensure that funds are easily accessible with minimal administrative requirements, allowing local Community-based Organizations (CBOs) and women's groups to be effectively supported.
- Earmark funds for women's and girls' specific needs, including hygiene packs and nutritious food for pregnant women, new mothers and babies; support local services to respond to gender-based violence. Ensure all aid programs include women's participation in decision-making, not only service delivery.
- Advocate for improved conditions for refugees living in camps in Thailand, including increased aid and the provision of legal documents that enable refugees to travel and work.
- Expand support for psychosocial care and trauma recovery for women survivors of violence and displacement and strengthen protection for women human rights defenders and journalists at risk.

## **About the Karen Women's Organization**

*The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) has been working to strengthen women in our community for over 40 years.*

Currently, KWO has a membership of over 70,000 women residing in Karen State, Burma, and refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. KWO is a prominent indigenous women's organization working in protection, with programs that directly serve women, girls, children, and the most vulnerable members of our community. We promote women's leadership, gender sensitivity, and community ownership in all aspects of our work. KWO is active in four main sectors: Organizing and Information Sharing, Education, Health Program, and Social Welfare.