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Karen Ni Civil Society Network

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Date: January 09, 2017

Press release by the Karen Ni Civil Society Network on the extrajudicial killing of three KNPP soldiers and one civilian

The Karen Ni Civil Society Network (KCSN) strongly condemns the extrajudicial killing of three Karen National Progressive Party (KNPP) soldiers and one civilian by the Burma Army on December 20, 2017.

The killing was in retaliation for KNPP soldiers searching Burma Army trucks travelling past their checkpoint on December 19, 2017. The trucks had been used to transport rations to frontline Burma Army camps, but on the return journey they had been filled with illegal timber, hidden under dry wood and bamboo. The KNPP soldiers at the 7-mile checkpoint east of Loikaw had stopped the trucks and found the logs, but had let them pass.

On December 20, at 5:00 am, 60 Burma Army soldiers from LIB 54, 102 and 72 under Loikaw Regional Military Command raided and surrounded the KNPP's 7-mile check point. Four KNPP soldiers and one civilian were asked to sit down in a line to take a picture, but when they sat down, the army opened fire and killed three KNPP soldiers and the civilian. This was seen by a KNPP soldier who managed to escape.

KCSN is appalled at the injustice of this killing, not only because the four men were murdered in cold blood, but also because the Burma Army troops were the ones at fault for smuggling timber in the first place. The KNPP soldiers, who had every right to try and prevent the theft of resources from their state, were instead punished for daring to challenge the authority of the Burma Army.

It was outrage at this injustice that led members of the Karen State Farmer Union and the Union of Karen State Youth to stage a demonstration in Loikaw on December 22. However, instead of listening to the people's voices, the government on January 5 detained five youth who led the demonstrations. KCSN strongly condemns the government for the detention of these five Karen youth leaders.

These events cast strong doubt over the sincerity of the Burma Army and the government towards the peace process. The KNPP had signed a ceasefire since 2012 in the hope of entering into a dialogue of equal partnership which could achieve genuine peace and a genuine federal union.

However, these latest events indicate that the Burmese government and military have no respect for the sovereign rights of the Karen State people, who had their historical independence snatched from them in 1948. Since then, invading Burma Army troops have carried out repeated scorched earth campaigns, depopulating large areas of the state to steal our rich natural resources – hydropower, minerals and timber - and driving out large numbers of refugees and IDPs who remain unable to return home till today. We have suffered the same ethnic cleansing that the Burma Army is now carrying out with impunity in northern Arakan State.

The KCSN therefore makes the following demands to the Burmese government and Burma Army:

1. We urge the government and the army to immediately implement the demand made by civil society groups, political parties and ethnic armed groups for a just investigation into the extrajudicial killing. There should be a joint investigation team consisting of members of the Burmese government and the KNPP under the supervision of the international community.
2. We urge the government and the army to immediately release the five youth leaders who demanded justice, and drop all charges against them.
3. We urge the government and the army to stop extracting natural resources in ethnic areas.
4. We urge the government and the army to stop launching attacks in ethnic areas and declare a nationwide ceasefire.
5. We urge the government and the army to cooperate with ethnic nationalities and draft a federal constitution to establish genuine peace and a genuine federal union in Burma.

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