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Karen Grassroots Women Network
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Statement of Fourth Karen Women's Seminar

28 October 2019

In order to build up the Karen women's movement, the Karen Grassroots Women Network (KGWN) held their 4th seminar in Lay Wah, Hpa-An District from 25 to 26 October 2019. The event saw 225 women gather to represent 34 Karen women's organizations from various regions including local women's organizations, women village chiefs, and individuals.

The aim of the seminar was to continue to build and support momentum for the women's movement at the grassroots level for the betterment of Karen society and community. The decisions and action plan from the third Karen Women's Seminar were reviewed and analyzed.

Over the two days, the participants discussed a range of critical issues including women's participation in the peace process, an analysis of Burma's current political and human rights situation, challenges to land access and ownership, the Salween Peace Park and the KNU's existing laws on the legal protections of women. Timely topics discussed also included government accountability and the international fact-finding mission to Burma.

The participants discussed the expansion of the KGWN membership which included new representatives for further networking purposes. For an improved implementation of the network strategy and future plans, the participants also elected one coordinator to take full responsibility for leading and organizing the projects with the support from other women, who laid the foundations of the work during the seminar.

To ensure the success of the network's strategy and future plans, the participants were divided into small groups according to the following topics: land issues, women's protection and legal protection, the peace process, refugee issues, and the 2020 Burma general election and the KNU election to discuss and share insights on moving forward.

At the conclusion section of the seminar, participants agreed on the following recommendations to address the ongoing lack of gender justice that Karen women are facing daily:

1. An abolishment of the Vacant, Fellow and Virgin (VfV) Land Management Law that formed under 2008 Constitution and resolve land issues across the country with justice.
2. Enforcement of women's protection laws and regulations to be widely implemented across the country.
3. Refugee issues should be a priority agenda item and donors and governments should continue to support cross border aid funding.

4. An obliteration of the 2008 constitution should obliterate and a drafting of a new genuine Constitution which recognizes federalism.
5. For the international community to stop investing in Burma while the conflict continues in ethnic areas.
6. A much-needed new approach to overcome the stalled and delayed peace process.
7. Upcoming elections by the Burma government and the KNU must be free and fair to empower women's participation.

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