

Joint Statement

On World Refugee Day, end the ongoing armed conflict, human rights violations and humanitarian crises in Myanmar

Ahead of 20 June, 2020 World Refugee Day, we the **123** undersigned civil society organizations call for an immediate end to the ongoing armed conflict, human rights violations and humanitarian crises in ethnic areas and for the establishment of a genuine federal democracy that protects and respects the rights of all people from Myanmar.

We are deeply concerned that despite the transition to so-called democracy since 2011, the world's longest civil war has continued to displace hundreds of thousands of ethnic people who have sought safety within different parts of their ancestral land within Myanmar as well as in neighboring countries, including Thailand, Bangladesh, India and Malaysia. This ongoing displacement is a testament to the failed peace process, as fighting between the Myanmar military and the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) has continued, even in areas where the Myanmar government and the EAOs have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

Meanwhile, the main perpetrator of human rights violations, the Myanmar military, continues to enjoy impunity under the 2008 military-drafted Constitution. The same violent, systematic and widespread tactics that were used by the Myanmar military against other ethnic people who have been displaced is now being wielded with might against civilians in Rakhine and Chin States, as whole villages are burned to ashes. Civilians – including women and children – are being killed by airstrikes and arbitrarily detained and tortured by the Myanmar military. These acts are in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention, and are being carried out under the cover of an Internet blackout that persists in eight townships in Rakhine and Chin States. In other ethnic areas, such as Shan State, torture and extrajudicial killing of ethnic Shan civilians is ongoing while for Ta'ang communities they live in fear of arbitrary arrest, torture and forced portering. In Karen State, fighting between the Myanmar military and the Karen National Liberation Army – the armed wing of the Karen National Union – has been ongoing, leading to displacement of villagers, even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, landmines throughout the country continue to pose a threat to villagers in conflict-affected areas.

The failing peace process and the ongoing human rights violations are deeply concerning for many of the nearly 100,000, mostly Karen and Karenni refugees who have remained in the nine refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border. They are struggling to maintain their livelihoods and survive as funding for refugees has decreased drastically. If the ongoing conflict and violence had not already made clear the lack of preparedness to receive refugees, the handful of recent returnees' lack of access to education and health, identification, and livelihood has.

Meanwhile, those displaced inside the country in Myanmar also suffer from limited humanitarian aid as we see some of the worst conditions for IDPs that we have observed in decades. For example, in places like Mon State where government's delivery of aid to remote locations has not reached those in need amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, while there are 110,000 IDPs in Kachin and northern Shan State, international humanitarian aid to the approximately 40,000 IDPs who are residing in Kachin Independence Organization-controlled areas has been blocked by the government since 2016, and the emergence of COVID-19 has made it even more difficult for local aid groups to reach these populations. Furthermore, IDP camps such as Ei Tu Hta in Karen State and the six Shan camps along the Shan-Thailand border are also suffering from a debilitating lack of essential aid. We are concerned that these IDPs inside the country may be left to starve without any food during the rainy season.

We are also deeply concerned that the homes and land that belong to both refugees and IDPs has been and is being confiscated by the Myanmar military, businesses and other malign actors. Land laws only further legitimize and facilitate large-scale land grabbing without recognition of customary land laws. There is currently no government land policy or system that provides restitution of housing, land and property for displaced persons that complies with the Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and IDPs (The Pinheiro Principles).

Alarming, The Ministry of Social Welfare Relief and Resettlement-led National IDP Camp Closure Strategy in Karen, Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States is moving forward without consultation with the displaced communities themselves or civil society organizations who have not been able to receive any information or offer input into the strategy. These areas have all observed clashes in recent years, displacing thousands, while in Rakhine State, fierce fighting between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army has led to the displacement of 160,000 people since the end of 2018.

In addition, in the world's largest and overcrowded refugee camps in Bangladesh, over 900,000 Rohingya refugees remain as a consequence of Myanmar military's 'clearance operations' in 2017. Plans to repatriate refugees have been unsuccessful as Rohingya's right to self-identification, citizenship and legal protection has been denied. They remain in the refugee camps, struggling for their survival and facing uncertainty to return to their places of origin in northern Rakhine State. They, like many ethnic displaced communities, continue to call for justice and accountability for the grave crimes they have endured.

Refugees and IDPs have been driven out of their homes and their rights and livelihood deprived but let us be clear that they have hopes and dreams. They yearn for security and a better future. They want to contribute to making their communities a better place. We thus recommend the following to the Myanmar Government:

- Take concrete steps towards a genuine peace process that addresses the root causes of the conflict, including ending military offensives, holding the Myanmar Military to account for human rights violations, the removal of Myanmar Military from ethnic areas, with villager settlements as priority, and amending the 2008 Constitution to establish a genuine federal democratic system of governance based on equality and self-determination;
- Ensure the full and meaningful participation of displaced populations in the decision-making level of all policy processes which affect them;
- Allow unrestricted humanitarian access to all sites of displacement, including allowing humanitarian actors to reach EAO-controlled areas without legal consequence or other types of harassment, intimidation or threat;
- Ensure that the agenda on housing, land and property rights for any returning IDPs and refugees is explicitly and formally included, discussed and agreed for implementation as an integral component in the peace process, in line with the Pinheiro Principles;
- Develop a policy and implement a system with full and meaningful participation of refugees and IDPs to provide restitution of housing, land and property for displaced persons with an appropriate timeline that complies with the Pinheiro Principles, and if restitution is not possible, provide adequate compensation for the current value of the land, crops and livestock that were destroyed due to confiscation or displacement;
- Recognize existing ethnic governance and service provision structures established, administered and maintained by EAOs to be in line with the federal democratic governance principles;

The above recommendations are to facilitate a voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of displaced ethnic communities from Myanmar. The undersigned organizations stand in solidarity with all refugees and internally displaced people across the world ahead of the World Refugee Day in recognition of their plight, as well as their strength and courage to continue to seek a better tomorrow.

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Signed by:

1. Action Committee for Democracy and Development (ACDD)
2. Albany Karen Community, NY, USA
3. All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress (AASYC)
4. Alliance Kachin Youth Union (AKYU)
5. Arakan American Community, USA
6. Arakan Rivers Network (ARN)
7. Arakanese (Rakhine) Association (NSW-Inc)
8. Arakanese (Rakhine) Association(NSW-Inc), Australia
9. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)
10. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP)
11. Association of United Nationalities in Japan
12. Athan - Freedom of Expression Activist Organization
13. Australian Karen Organisation Inc. (AKO Inc.)
14. Burmese Rohingya Organization UK
15. Calgary Karen Community Association (CKCA), Canada
16. California Karen Youth Forum, CA, USA
17. California Shan Society
18. Candle Lights
19. Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO)
20. Chin Refugee Committee, Delhi
21. Chin Refugee Committee, Malaysia
22. East Bago- Former Political Prisoners Network (EB-FPPN)
23. Eastern Pennsylvania Karen Community
24. Edmonton Karen Community Youth Organization, Canada
25. Equality Myanmar (EQMM)
26. Finland Karen Culture Association
27. Freedom For Burma, USA
28. Future Light Center (FLC)
29. Generation Wave (GW)
30. Genuine People's Servants (GPS)
31. Harmony Youth Association
32. Human Rights Educators Network (HREN)
33. Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM)
34. Humanity Institute (HI)
35. International Campaign for Arakan (ICA)
36. International Karen Organization (IKO)
37. Israel Karen Organization

38. Kachin Canadian Association
39. Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG)
40. Kachin National Organization, USA
41. Kachin National Youth Network
42. Kachin Organization of Australia
43. Kachin Refugee Committee (Malaysia)
44. Kachin Women Union (KWU)
45. Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)
46. Karen American Association of Wisconsin (KAAW), WI, USA
47. Karen Association of Huron South Dakota
48. Karen Community Association UK
49. Karen Community in Norway
50. Karen Community in Syracuse, NY, USA
51. Karen Community London, Canada
52. Karen Community of Akron, Inc, HO, USA
53. Karen Community of Canada (KCC)
54. Karen Community of Czech Republic
55. Karen Community of Denmark
56. Karen Community of Hamilton, Canada
57. Karen Community of Iowa
58. Karen Community of Ireland
59. Karen Community of Kansas City (KS & MO)
60. Karen Community of Kitchener & Waterloo, Canada
61. Karen Community of Leamington, Canada
62. Karen Community of Lethbridge, Canada
63. Karen Community of Louisville, KY, USA
64. Karen Community of Minnesota (KCM)
65. Karen Community of New Bern, NC, USA
66. Karen Community of North Carolina, USA
67. Karen Community of Ottawa, Canada
68. Karen Community of Regina, Canada
69. Karen Community of Saskatoon, Canada
70. Karen Community of Thunderbay, Canada
71. Karen Community of Toronto, Canada
72. Karen Community of Windsor, Canada
73. Karen Community of Winnipeg, Canada
74. Karen Community Society of British Columbia (KCSBC), Canada
75. Karen Culture Organization of Minnesota, MN, USA.
76. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN)
77. Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)
78. Karen National Community - The Netherlands
79. Karen Organisation for Relief and Development (KORD)
80. Karen Organization of America, USA
81. Karen Organization of Illinois
82. Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN)
83. Karen Refugee Committee (KRC)
84. Karen Students Network Group (KSNG)
85. Karen Swedish Community

86. Karen Women's Organization (KWO)
87. Karen Youth of Norway (KYN)
88. Karen Youth of Toronto, Canada
89. Karenni American Association, USA
90. Karenni Human Rights Group (KnHRG)
91. Karenni Legal and Human Rights Center (KnLHRC)
92. Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO)
93. Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC)
94. Karenni Social Welfare and Development Center (KSWDC)
95. Korea Karen Organisation (KKO)
96. Koung Jor Shan Refugee Camp
97. Loka Ahlinn (Social Development Organization)
98. Mae Tao Clinic (MTC)
99. Malaysia Karen Organisation (MKO)
100. Myanmar People Alliance - Shan State (MPA-SS)
101. Nationalities Alliance of Burma, USA
102. Network for Human Rights Documentation - Burma (ND-Burma)
103. New Zealand Karen Association Inc. (NZKA)
104. Overseas Karen Organisation - Japan (OKO Japan)
105. Pa-O Women's Union (PWU)
106. Pa-O Youth Organization (PYO)
107. Progressive Voice
108. Ramhkye (Youth Rescue)
109. Relief Action Network for IDP and Refugee (RANIR)
110. Rochester Karen Community, NY, USA
111. Rohingya American Society (RAS), USA
112. Southern Youth
113. Synergy Social Harmony Organization
114. Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization (TSYU)
115. Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO)
116. The Seagull: Human Rights, Peace & Development
117. US Campaign for Burma
118. Utica Karen Community
119. Women's League of Burma (WLB)
120. Women's Peace Network (WPN)
121. World Kachin Congress
122. Wunpawng Amyu Sha Mung Bawng Rapdaw (Kachin National Consultative Assembly)
123. Youth Circle (YC)