



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

## International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

June 19<sup>th</sup> 2020

Today is International Day for Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The term “conflict-related sexual violence” refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for the purpose of sexual violence or exploitation.

Sexual violence is often used deliberately as a weapon in armed conflict; this holds true for the conflict in Myanmar. In decades-long conflict with the KNU, the Tatmadaw allowed its soldiers to commit sexual violence on civilians with impunity. According to the UN General Assembly, “civilians account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, women and girls were particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence, inter alia by terrorist and extremist groups”.<sup>1</sup>

The Tatmadaw’s strategic use of sexual violence as a weapon on ethnic minorities fits the description of a terrorist or extremist group. Between January 2012 and November 2018, KHRG received 52 reports covering 27 cases of sexual violence, including seven cases in 2018 alone.<sup>2</sup> Even though sexual violence is more widespread and severe during the conflict, KHRG still receive reports of sexual violence cases as recent as 2019.<sup>3</sup>

The practice of impunity by the Tatmadaw regarding sexual violence is what has allowed such widespread violations. Most victims of conflict-related sexual violence still haven’t gotten justice and in many cases they didn’t even have the chance to report or talk about what happened. Recently there is a decline in sexual violence committed by the Tatmadaw, but recent clashes are concerning.

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 June 2015](#), A/RES/69/293

<sup>2</sup> KHRG, [Suffering in silence? Sexual violence against women in Southeast Myanmar](#) (December 2018)

<sup>3</sup> KHRG, News Bulletin, [‘He only let me go after he finished raping me’: Sexual Violence in Southeast Myanmar](#), 2019

The most concerning part about the sexual violence that occurred is that the perpetrators were never held accountable which encourages further violations in the future.

Sexual violence survivors should be given the opportunity to speak out, receive remedy, physical and mental health support and means to reintegrate into society with any prejudice or discrimination. KHRG urges ethnic organizations to help the survivors receive the kind of support listed above. The Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw need to investigate past sexual abuses across Myanmar and ensure that those responsible are held accountable without giving any excuses. Failing to address and investigate the past abuses will only further proves that impunity for sexual violence against ethnic minorities still persist for the Tatmadaw and the Myanmar government.