



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

### **Statement on World Environment Day 2020**

On World Environment Day it is important that we highlight the need to protect the environment. Destruction of the environment and our planet's biodiversity is a pressing issue and affects all people throughout the world. Now more than ever, we are able to see the negative consequences of environmental problems and biodiversity loss. Therefore, we must come together and fulfil our responsibility to enhance and preserve the environment.

This year's theme is *Time For Nature*. Everything humans need to sustain life comes from nature. The food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink all come from nature. However, human actions have had detrimental effects on the natural environment and warning signs are appearing in every part of the world. Global warming and climate change have gotten worse every year. The frequency of natural disasters is a sign of these environmental changes that humans cannot ignore anymore.

Since the preliminary ceasefire agreement in 2012, several new abuses have emerged in South-east Myanmar which have had a detrimental effect on the environment. The lands of indigenous Karen have caught the attention of those who want to take advantage of the richness of their resources and has led to an increase in development projects. This increase in development, along with a failure by economic actors to undertake environmental impact assessments and put proper safeguards in place to protect the local areas has resulted in problems of water pollution, mass deforestation, and damage to fertile soil and crops.<sup>1</sup> These economic actors need to be held accountable; they cannot be allowed to continue this type of practice as it will have a lasting impact on sustainable resources and practices in local areas. We need to put a stop to development projects that are being executed with little regard for the environment and the local communities. KHRG calls for

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<sup>1</sup> For more information read KHRG (2020) [Field Report: Militarisation, environmental pollution and sexual violence against children, July to December 2019](#); KHRG (2018) [Development or Destruction? The human rights impacts of hydropower development on villagers in Southeast Myanmar](#); KHRG (2019) [Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Logging and gold mining activities threatening community livelihoods, land confiscation by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Mone and Shwegyin townships, November 2018 to January 2019](#)

there to be responsibility and accountability for all business actors who conduct any commercial activity that cause environmental impact.

KHRG urges everyone to be self-aware and to take positive steps in order to protect our environment. We all have the power to make a difference and we must act now before it is too late. If we continue on our current path, we will further destroy our natural environment which will have severe implications both locally and worldwide. This year, with the spread of Covid-19, we have seen how inter-connected we all are; therefore, we must act together right now as this time is *time for nature*.

