



The Karen Women's Organization Strongly Condemns Attack on Karen Civilian Woman by the Burma Army

For Immediate Release

21 July 2020: The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) condemns the brutal murder of a civilian woman, Mu Naw, who was killed at point-blank range in Karen State by two Burma Army soldiers. This unprovoked taking of a young woman's life, a mother of three, is yet another stark and tragic reminder of the terrors the Burma Army is capable of. KWO calls for the two soldiers to be arrested, charged immediately and tried with full transparency before a civilian court. The murder of a young woman is obviously against the law both domestically and internationally. The time is now for the Burmese government to act aggressively to put in place the most basic rule of law.

According to local authorities, Mu Naw was killed on 16 July 2020, when two Burma Army soldiers left their base to stop at a monastery for lunch. Afterwards, they went into Po Lo Hta village and entered Mu Naw's home. They asked her for an empty bag, as she turned, one of the recruits loaded his rifle and shot Mu Naw in the left eye, in the mouth and again in her chest. She was then robbed of the gold jewelry she was wearing and the perpetrators fled the village. Mu Naw had no weapon. She posed no threat.

This latest inhumane attack reflects the systematic human rights abuses by the military against civilians. It is part of the Burma Army's greater strategy of brutalizing ethnic populations in order to impose and maintain their superiority – no matter the cost. Such acts prove and reinforce soldiers' sense of impunity, which is built by institutionalized impunity and corrupt military justice mechanisms.

Ethnic women are too often victims of state-sponsored violence and rights violations, which strip them of their dignity and identity. Only a few cases are ever reported, and the survivors who do report rarely see justice served. The increased militarized presence in ethnic areas heightens the fear of seeking any justice for the ongoing human rights violations by the Burmese military. Under international law, the Burma government and military have a duty, as components of the State, to protect the rights of all people in Burma. This duty includes the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and punish human rights violations. Resolution 2122 of the UN Security Council specifically calls for prosecution of crimes against women, in addition to addressing root causes of armed conflict and the security risks faced by women.

The offensive in Karen State, as well as in conflict-torn Shan, Kachin, Chin and Rakhine states has expanded in recent months. Civilians have been targeted in remote areas across the

country where the Burma Army has tortured, killed, raped and unlawfully detained villagers as well as indiscriminately fired artillery shells into local villages. The Burma Army continues to operate with no accountability and no regard for the lives they have disrupted. Indeed, the fact that the Burma Army refuses to withdraw troops from civilian areas shows that there is no genuine commitment to the peace-making process or national reconciliation.

KWO calls for access to be made available to independent investigators to document and collect evidence of the ongoing human rights abuses in ethnic areas, such as the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) and the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma. We call on both the government and the military to end human rights violations committed by State actors and undertake necessary political and legal reforms to ensure accountability and the rule of law (including putting the military and police under civilian control, and ensuring the independence of the judiciary).

Mu Naw did not deserve to lose her life. Her children do not deserve to grow up motherless. Her community does not deserve to live in terror of this happening again. Civilians do not deserve to be caught in decades of brutal warfare caused by the Burma Army. We all deserve a life without fear. It is time for the government and military to hold those who commit acts of violence accountable.

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