



## **Statement by the Karen Peace Support Network**

For Immediate Release 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020

### **Karen Must Be Free To Honour Martyrs – Drop Charges Now**

The Karen Peace Support Network condemns the arrest of two Karen activists and a woman activist at an event to commemorate Karen Martyrs' Day. The event was being held legally and in line with Covid-19 regulations.

Three people at the event, Sa Thein Saw Min, Saw Hser Kwa Lar and Daw Sein Htwe were arrested, and Daw Sein Htwe remains in jail. Daw Sein Htwe faces jail for being at a separate event protesting against people being arrested at last year's Karen Martyrs' Day event. Sa Thein Saw Min and Saw Hser Kwa Lar face charges under the notorious Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act.

When Burmese people held their Martyrs' Day events in July, and held events last week for the 8888 uprising anniversary, they did not face harassment, arrest and jail in the same way Karen people do.

The law is being applied selectively in a racist and discriminatory way. It reminds Karen people of the discrimination we have faced for decades and why, 73 years ago, Karen people took to the streets protesting for equality and rights with the slogan, 'Give the Burman one Kyat, give the Karen one Kyat.'

Even today, under a civilian government and almost ten years of a dead end peace process, Karen people still face discrimination in their own country, just for being Karen.

The civilian government has the power to drop charges against our Karen brothers and sister, and must do so immediately. There should be a review of laws used to discriminate against ethnic and religious groups in Burma, leading to the repeal of the laws, to be replaced by laws protecting ethnic and religious diversity.

Our Karen people have suffered the loss of mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, daughters and sons, in the most horrific way at the hands of the Burma Army. They take our family and our friends, and won't even let us gather to remember, to grieve and to honour their memory. This is cruelty heaped on top of discrimination. That this is taking place just days before the next round of peace talks reveals further the lack of genuine good intentions in the peace process by the civilian government.

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