



KACHIN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION THAILAND

P.O. BOX 415, CHIANG MAI 50000, THAILAND

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Burma Army persecution of civilians continues in Kawng Kha, six years after the rape-murder of two Kachin teachers

On the six-year anniversary of the rape-murder of two Kachin teachers in Kawng Kha village, Muse District, KWAT reiterates our calls for justice and an end to ongoing Burma Army aggression and persecution of civilians in northern Burma.

Early in the morning of January 20, 2015, the bodies of the two volunteer teachers were found in their house in Kawng Kha, with marks of brutal torture and rape. All evidence pointed to Burma Army troops of LIB 503 who had arrived in the village the night before, but military authorities blocked all attempts to seek justice and instead tried to scapegoat two local youth. Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing himself threatened to prosecute anyone alleging military involvement in the incident – exercising his ultimate power under Burma's 2008 Constitution.

The perpetrators of this heinous crime therefore remain free to this day, and the Burma Army continues to enjoy its license to rape, torture and kill with impunity.

Six years on, the nightmare of military repression also continues in Kawng Kha. The village lies in an active conflict zone, where the Burma Army has deployed thousands of elite combat troops to try and annihilate the Kachin Independence Army and other ethnic resistance forces in northern Shan State. Twice last month, the Burma Army fired barrages of long-range artillery shells into the area from their hilltop base near the 105-mile trade zone, east of Muse.

Burma Army troops of Infantry Divisions 88 and 99 constantly patrol through the area, camping in local villages and extorting food. They frequently pass through Kawng Kha, camping in villagers' houses, exactly as on that fateful night in 2015, rekindling terror among local residents. ID 99 is notorious for torturing and killing civilians in northern Burma, as well as for mass rape and slaughter of Rohingya women and girls in 2017.

The two Kawng Kha youth falsely scapegoated for the rape-murders no longer dare live in their village, due to fear of further torture and harassment. They and their families thus continue to suffer for a crime they did not commit.

Exactly five years ago, KWAT appealed to the newly elected NLD government to bring the perpetrators of the Kawng Kha rape-murders to justice and to end military impunity for sexual violence. Not only did the government ignore our appeals, but State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi chose to publicly side with the Burma Army in denying allegations of military rape.

“I trusted the government to do something about this (case) but there was no action from them. It makes me feel so upset,” said a close relative of one of the murdered teachers.

Governments all over the world have pledged commitment to ending sexual violence in armed conflict. Yet, these same governments are now pumping billions of dollars of investment and aid into Burma, ignoring the suffering of women in ethnic conflict areas who live in daily fear of rape by government troops.

International pressure is urgently needed to end military impunity for rape in Burma. We call for an immediate end to “business as usual” and the imposition of broad economic sanctions to pressure the Burmese government to stop protecting military rapists, and to end Burma Army offensives throughout the country and withdraw troops so that inclusive political negotiations towards a new federal constitution can begin.

For More Information:

Moon Nay Li (+66 855 233 791)

San Htoi (+95 995 9880 580)

kwat.office@gmail.com

www.kachinwomen.com