



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

KHRG's Statement on the Removal of Saw Ba Oo Gyi's Statue in Ayeyarwady Region

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KHRG condemns in the strongest terms the forced removal of statues of ethnic nationalist leaders in the public space. KHRG calls on the Myanmar authorities and military to allow ethnic communities to preserve and develop their historical heritage as specified in the 2015 Ethnic Rights Protection Law.

On January 3rd 2021, the local Karen community in Baegaret, Ayeyarwady Region was forced to remove a statue of Karen nationalist leader Saw Ba Oo Gyi from their village. The statue was originally set up in August 2020, after which the local population faced continued pressure from the local Myanmar government and Tatmadaw authorities to take it down. The villagers eventually complied, fearing they would otherwise be subject to legal action.

Similar incidents have also occurred in KHRG's operation area. In February 2018 and February 2019, the Tatmadaw objected to the installation of a statue of Saw Ba Oo Gyi in Dooplaya District. This created a feeling of injustice among local Karen villagers and undermined their trust in the peace process, which is based on the promise of equality between ethnic groups.

In parallel, the Myanmar authorities have recently started erecting statues of General Aung San across the country. Although this policy was opposed by the local population in ethnic states, dissent was met with force in some instances. In February 2019, the police used violent force to break up a demonstration where thousands of demonstrators had gathered to peacefully protest against the installation of a statue of Aung San in Kayah State.

The Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw have therefore been consistently banning Karen communities from paying tribute to their historical figures, while forcefully imposing symbols related to Burmese culture and history in ethnic areas.

If Myanmar is to establish a federal union where different ethnic groups can live together in harmony, it must ensure that all its citizens enjoy the same rights and opportunities, regardless of their ethnic background. KHRG urges the Myanmar government to promote, protect and respect the rights that it has already set forth in the Ethnic Rights Protection Law; and to stop interfering with how ethnic minorities choose to celebrate their historical heritage and figures.

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