

International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict
Myanmar women need safety and accountability

19th June 2021

On this International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, we call for an immediate end to sexual assaults on women and men of all ethnic groups, and for accountability for the Myanmar military.

The Tatmadaw's repression of the anti-coup movement shows that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be used by the junta as a brutal tool to intimidate and maintain their power and control.

Myanmar women are defiant and play a leading role in the protests and in the resistance movement. While doing so, they are defying Burmese patriarchal traditional social norms and creatively challenging gender stereotypes. As the Women's League of Burma (WLB) highlighted, *"with over 60 percent of women leading the protests, they are fearlessly putting themselves in the direct line of defense"*.

Women bear the brunt of the violence, often through sexual violence. Reports indicate that members of security forces have manhandled, groped, and verbally and sexually harassed female protesters. In some instances, they forced women to dance in the street for their entertainment, or pressured women for sex in exchange for ensuring that their names are removed from warrant lists. Particularly concerning is the differential treatment of women during interrogation and detention, in the form of sexual and gender-based violence, sexism and misogyny. There are reports of sexual abuses behind bars, including beatings on genitals and sexual threats. As recently highlighted by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M), a group of independent international experts, *"sexual and gender-based violence remains a brutal strategy employed by the junta to terrorise and punish the civilian population"*.

The use by the military of sexual violence as a weapon of war and oppression is nothing new; this strategy has been used against ethnic minorities for decades. In its reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar ("FFM") concluded that *"rape and other sexual violence have been a particularly egregious and recurrent feature of the targeting of the civilian population in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States since 2011"*. The FFM found that *"sexual and gender-based violence was a hallmark of the Tatmadaw's operations in northern Myanmar and in Rakhine"* and that it was part of a deliberate, well-planned strategy to intimidate, terrorize and punish civilian populations.

Indeed, civil society groups have long documented and denounced the use of sexual violence as a tactic to hurt and humiliate girls and women, and men, from all ethnic communities. Depending on the circumstances, sexual and gender-based violence may constitute crimes under international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. This unchecked pattern of using sexual and gender-based violence as a tool of warfare must stop. Decades of impunity have emboldened the Myanmar military to continue perpetrating these heinous crimes without any accountability. The time for justice has come. The Myanmar military must stop using sexual violence in conflict and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

We therefore make the following recommendations:

To the international community:

- Make a referral of the Myanmar situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC)
- Strengthen the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM)
- Establish a coordinated arms embargo against Myanmar
- Issue further targeted sanctions against the Myanmar military's businesses
- Recognize the NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar in order to help end the military coup and stop atrocities against civilians.

To the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN):

- Support the establishment of an arms embargo by the international community
- Issue a timeframe for the implementation of its "five-point consensus" on Myanmar and hold the Myanmar military accountable to it in an effective and transparent manner
- Call for the immediate release of political prisoners
- Recognize the NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar in order to help end the military coup and stop atrocities against civilians

To the National Unity Government (NUG):

- Continue documenting allegations of sexual and gender-based violence by security forces
- Cooperate with the IIMM
- Commit to bringing perpetrators to justice, including by acceding to the ICC Rome Statute and making a declaration accepting ICC jurisdiction for past crimes
- Commit to preventing sexual violence by addressing its root causes, including gender inequality and patriarchal social norms, and by providing awareness trainings to security forces under NUG's authority.
- Commit to establishing meaningful transitional justice mechanisms to address victim's rights to truth and reparations, in particular rehabilitation programs for survivors.

Organizations Signed:

- ACbit Timor Leste
- Advocacy Forum (Nepal)
- All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress (AASYC)
- Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP)
- Amnesty International Indonesia
- Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
- Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)
- Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)
- Association Human Rights Defenders and Promoters
- Chin Human Rights Organization
- Cross Cultural Foundation (CRCF) (Thailand)
- East Bago – Former Political Prisoners Network
- Forum Asia
- Forum Pengada Layanan (Indonesia)
- Future Light Center

- Gender Equality Network (GEN)
- Hear My Voice- Women's Network
- Human Rights Foundation of Monland
- Human Rights Organization of Nepal (HURON)
- Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) (Indonesia)
- Institute Ungu (Indonesia)
- Kachin Women Peace Network
- Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)
- KontraS (the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence) (Indonesia)
- KontraS Aceh
- Kurawal Foundation (Indonesia)
- LK3 (Lembaga Kajian Keislaman dan Kemasyarakatan) (Indonesia)
- Migrant Care
- Milk Tea Alliance (Indonesia)
- ND-Burma
- ODHIKAR (Bangladesh)
- Pa-O Youth Organization
- Perempuan AMAN (Indonesia)
- Progressive Voice
- Rohingya Women Association for Education and Development
- Rohingya Women for Justice and Peace
- Rohingya Women Voice
- Rumah Kitab (Indonesia)
- SAFEnet
- Sister to Sister
- Solidaritas Perempuan (Indonesia)
- Spring Rainbow
- Suriya Women's Development Centre
- Ta'ang Legal Aid (TLA)
- Ta'ang Students and Youth Union (TSYU)
- Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO)
- Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU)
- The May 18 Memorial Foundation
- Tri Star
- Union of Karenni State Youth (UKSY)
- Vimutti Women Organization (VWO)
- Women's League of Burma (WLB)
- Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (Indonesia)

1 additional organization endorsed this statement but due to security concerns would like to remain anonymous.

Individuals Signed:

- Basantakumar Wareppam, Human Rights Lawyer (India)
- Cristina Sevilla, Human Rights Lawyer (Philippines)
- Upul Kumarapperuma, Attorney at Law (Srilanka)