



Women's Peace Network

Press Release | Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day Panel Discussion: “What does Justice Mean for Victims and Survivors of Sexual Violence?”

On 25 August, 2021, the Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day Organizing Committee and the Women's Peace Network held an online panel discussion to commemorate the four years since the Myanmar military's systematic use of sexual violence in its genocidal attacks against Rohingya.

“The military has killed indiscriminately, slaughtered us like animals. Tens of thousands of Rohingya women were gang-raped by the Myanmar military. It was systematic and we consider it as part of the genocide. They were using rape as a weapon against women to force us out of Myanmar. There still is no justice for us,” explained Win Win Maw, a poet, cultural agent and writer at the Rohingya Cultural Memory Center in Bangladesh.

Moon Nay Li, who has worked for the Kachin Women's Association for 18 years and currently holds the position of advocacy officer and spokesperson, highlighted that for decades, the military used rape as a weapon of war with impunity, and the international community's failure to act emboldened them to continue this horrific practice to this day.

“I think the lack of impunity emboldened them, the lack of punishment and the military immunity have made the situation worse,” she said.

Khin Omar, human rights advocate and founder of a number of civil society organizations, including the Women's League of Burma, Burma Partnership, and Progressive Voice, then elaborated on the question of justice for survivors, stating that survivors and victims of sexual violence needed remedy, and that Myanmar as a country needs to hold the military accountable so that they would “stop raping women.”

Another of our panelists, Naw K'nyaw Paw, a lifelong peace activist and General Secretary of the Karen Women's Organization, explained the psychosocial consequences of sexual violence as follows: “The victims of sexual violence have suffered mental and physical trauma, they can't focus on work tasks, they seek isolation, they become triggered and re-traumatized, and they face stigma. Sexual violence can also separate women from their social communities, but they need an income and social support. We need justice, but we also need to help victims to support their livelihoods and dignity.”

As some of our speakers pointed out, sexual violence against ethnic minorities was long seen as something normal in Myanmar, mainly because ethnic minorities such as Rohingya were not perceived as Burmese citizens. Dr. Tin Mar Oo, a medical doctor and Rohingya women rights activist told us that these feelings of disunity are starting to dissipate under the current junta rule.



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“Myanmar is at war. The military is attacking everybody, in different parts of Myanmar. They are using sexual violence as a weapon, we have to understand that. It is important that we work together to find justice for all the victims of the Myanmar military,” she proclaimed.

The fruitful discussion, moderated by former political prisoner and founder of the Women's Peace Network, Wai Wai Nu, demonstrated the strong need for remedy and accountability. Hence, together with our panelists, the Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day Committee and the Women's Peace Network call on the international community to provide financial and psychological support for the victims of the Burmese Military's wide-spread use of sexual and gender-based violence. We also call on communities to provide social and psychological support for traumatized survivors. Further, we demand that the National Unity Government repeal the 2014 and 2015 Race and Protection laws, which discriminate against ethnic, racial, and religious minorities and render women and girls who are already a target to violence even more vulnerable.

Moreover, as former Dutch ambassador, member of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, and author Laetitia van den Assum has put it, “without accountability, justice doesn't stand a chance”. If we want justice for survivors, we cannot permit the junta to continue their campaign of terror with impunity. Thus, we call on the United Nations Security Council to refer Myanmar to the International Criminal Court or create a Special Tribunal to hold the military accountable for their crimes.