



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Karen Human Rights Group Commemorates International Day of Peace 2021

21 September 2021

Today, September 21, the world commemorates the International Day of Peace. This annual event was created by a resolution of the UN General Assembly in 1981. It is a day on which armed actors across the world are expected to cease hostilities for 24 hours as a celebration of the spirit of peace and the shared hope that we will one day live in a world where conflict is resolved without resorting to violence.

This year, International Day of Peace is observed in the context of the February 2021 Myanmar military coup. Since this day, the junta has committed serious crimes and violations of international law against the people of Myanmar, including but not limited to the disproportionate use of force against peaceful protestors, arbitrary killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence. Other fundamental freedoms such as the freedom of expression have also been severely curtailed through the restriction of internet and communication services, as well as the junta's enacted laws that criminalise the legitimate exercise of free expression. All of these have happened against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic that has continued to have detrimental effects on the health and livelihood of the people.

Since March 2021, in Karen State, there has been intense fighting between the State Administration Council's ("SAC") military and ethnic armed groups. In particular, the SAC's military has conducted airstrikes and ground attacks that are indiscriminate in nature. The aerial bombings and mortar shelling have caused death and serious injury to villagers, as well as the destruction of homes and other civilian objects. In turn, this has led to a severe humanitarian crisis marked by the displacement of thousands of villagers from their homes and ancestral lands, food shortages, and the lack of adequate healthcare in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The increased militarisation and resumption of intense armed hostilities in Karen State have also led to other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. KHRG and KWO have been receiving reports of soldiers pillaging villages, the use of women as human shields, forced labour, as well as the use of landmines by all armed actors in a seemingly indiscriminate manner that have maimed and even killed villagers who were often on their way to work at the markets or farms.

The theme of this year's International Day of Peace is "Recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world." For Myanmar particularly, this message is a reminder that the ethnic people of the country, who have been marginalised, must have a seat at the table concerning all matters relating to the resolution of the current crisis and the future of Myanmar. It is also a reminder that for peace to be sustainable there has to be justice and accountability for the crimes committed by all armed actors regardless of their ethnic affiliations.

In commemoration of International Day of Peace, KHRG calls on the SAC and all other armed actors to observe this important event by participating in the international ceasefire. Let this Day of Peace be a moment of reflection on the countless deaths that have occurred as a result of the conflict and remember the shared responsibility of all actors in bringing about peace in Myanmar.