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Courage in the face of violence. Women's League of Burma receives ACFID's Sir Ronald Wilson Human Rights Award

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) has presented the 2021 Sir Ronald Wilson Human Rights Award to The Women's League of Burma.

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) is a national network of 13 ethnic women's rights organisations working towards the advancement of the status of women for a peaceful, just and federal democratic union for over 20 years.

In the immediate aftermath of the military takeover earlier this year, WLB closed its Yangon office and established an advocacy team to work underground in Burma/Myanmar and across the border in Thailand and India. They now produce a monthly situation report detailing human rights violations against women, which has become a key source of data used by journalists, global analysts and activists.

Presenting the award ACFID President Susan Pascoe said

"Throughout 2021, WLB has been at the forefront of challenging the military coup in Myanmar, demonstrating outstanding leadership in international advocacy promoting women's human rights.

"Members of the WLB risk their lives every day to defend and advance the rights of women of all ethnic identities in Burma. This award acknowledges their courage in the face of violence.

Continuing on, Marc Purcell, CEO of ACFID, stated that

"ACFID supports WLB's call for urgent action to reject the military junta and support a transition towards an inclusive, federal democracy."

WLB has taken a strong public position in promoting the human rights of Rohingya women. It was one of the first civil society organisations in Myanmar to speak out against the military's deadly crackdown on the Rohingya Muslims in August 2017, which resulted in more than 700,000 people fleeing across the border into Bangladesh.

On receiving the award, the General Secretary of the WLB, Naw Hser Hser said,

"Following the coup, the majority of the people of Burma, including democracy activists and women's human rights activists, have felt let down by much of the international community. This award sends the message to women human rights defenders in Burma, including from the 13 member organizations of WLB, that the Australian community does recognise and support our struggle for justice and peace. The award motivates us, boosts us to withstand any obstacles and helps sustain us.

"We hope through this award more people in the Australian community will understand the scale of atrocities committed by the military junta and will reject the military junta, and over 70 years of struggle of ethnic nationalities against the dictatorship.

“We hope the international community, including the Australian Government, will join with other democracies to adopt targeted sanctions on military leaders and their business interests. [We hope that]

“This award is dedicated to all heroines, both fallen and alive, especially ethnic women, who have dedicated their lives to our struggle for fundamental rights. On behalf of WLB, I would like to say thank you and express our most sincere gratitude and appreciation for presenting us with the Sir Ronald Wilson Human Rights Award from the Australian Council for International Development. We are humbled at the recognition of our work, and accept the award with grace and humility.”

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About the Award

The Sir Ronald Wilson Human Rights Award is presented annually to an individual or organisation that has made an outstanding contribution to advancing human rights.

Following Sir Ronald Wilson’s death in 2002, the ACFID award was created in his honour.

Sir Ronald was a passionate campaigner for human rights, conducting the landmark Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which resulted in the 1997 ‘Bringing them Home’ report.

Sir Ron Wilson AC KBE CMG QC served as a judge on the High Court of Australia, President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission until 1997 and was President of ACFID between 1998 and 2001.

Past recipients include, Indonesian lawyer and human rights defender, Veronica Koman (2019) Behrouz Boochani (2018), The Referendum Council (2017) and former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Professor Gillian Triggs (2016).
