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International Karen Organisation

Asia Pacific Region European Region US/Canada Region

Statement by International Karen Organisation

Monday 21st December 2021

Karen State Crisis: Sanction Aviation Fuel, Arms and Gas Revenue

The International Karen Organisation today called for the urgent implementation of new targeted strategic sanctions on the Burmese military in response to escalating attacks against civilians in Karen State.

Simultaneous attacks by the Burmese military are taking place in different parts of Karen State, in Sagaing Region, Kachin State, Chin State and many other ethnic states, at the same time as the military continue to make mass arrests of political leaders, peaceful protesters and PDF members across the country. This demonstrates that the international community is moving much too slowly to cut the flow of arms and revenue to the military, and reduce their capacity to attack and oppress the people of Burma.

Sanctions need to be applied on the supply of aviation fuel, arms, and on gas revenue and other sources of revenue for the Burmese military. Funding for cross border aid needs to be increased without placing unnecessary reporting burdens on local civil society organisations which are impossible to meet, and effectively act to block life-saving aid to those in need.

The Burmese military appear to be targeting hundreds of Burmese democracy activists who have taken shelter in Lay Kay Kaw, a town in Karen State under the control of the Karen National Union (KNU). In the process, they are indiscriminately using heavy artillery and gunfire against civilian areas, forcing thousands of Karen villagers to flee as well as the democracy activists. This is a war crime. It is a violation of international law.

On 14th December the Burmese military raided the town of Lay Kay Kaw, in the KNU controlled Dooplya District, in southern Karen State, bordering Thailand. They arrested around 30 activists who had taken refuge in the town. Hundreds of Burmese democracy activists were sheltering in Lay Kay Kaw.

On 15th December the Burmese military escalated attacks, using heavy artillery in surrounding areas and forcing more than 1,000 local civilians to flee. In the following days these attacks continued and expanded. On 19th December the Burmese military began attacking Palu and other nearby villages where many people who had fled attacks against Lay Kay Kaw had taken shelter.

As of the morning of 20th December, the number of people displaced by these attacks was estimated at 4000. With numerous attacks taking place, numbers of displaced people are constantly changing.

At the same time, the Burmese military has increased shelling against civilian villages in Doo Tha Htu (Thaton) District in Karen State, as more Burmese military troops move into KNU areas.

In both areas the Karen National Liberation Army is defending civilians against attacks and encroachment by the Burmese military.

On 18th December around 30 Burmese military vehicles, including armoured personnel carriers of the type supplied by China and Ukraine, and military transport vehicles, brought reinforcements through Myawaddy travelling towards Dooplaya.

There are increased jets and drones flying over the areas, increasing fear of indiscriminate aerial bombing of the kind that happened in March and April this year. Before the new attacks this December there were already more than 80,000 people internally displaced, mostly because of bombings and the threat of bombings. Jets and drones have continued to fly over the area, preventing villagers from returning home and stopping them from growing this year's crops, creating a humanitarian crisis on top of the COVID pandemic.

Around 2,000 Karen villagers crossed into Thailand this week and around 600 have been pushed back by the Thai authority.

We call on the government of Thailand not to keep pushing refugees back into a war zone as they have done so many times in the past. We call on the USA, EU, UK, Canada, Australia and sympathetic governments, and on the United Nations Secretary General, to make representations to the Royal Thai Government not to force refugees to return against their will.

The Burmese military are attacking our people with much more sophisticated weaponry than they used before the so-called reform process began. They have used the past ten years with sanctions lifted and more business opportunities to increase income and buy more modern and deadly equipment. They have more heavy artillery, more jets and new drones which they are using against civilians.

It is absolutely vital that more sanctions are rapidly imposed on the Burmese military in order to reduce their military capacity.

The international community must:

Sanction aviation fuel

The majority of people in Karen State have been displaced by air strikes and are unable to return because of the threat of airstrikes. These air strikes have killed and maimed innocent civilians and have created a humanitarian crisis. The international community must impose sanctions to stop aviation fuel reaching the military. Companies which supply the military with aviation fuel should be sanctioned and evidence collected for future prosecutions for complicity in violations of international law.

Expand the arms embargo

The United Nations Security Council should impose an arms embargo. With Russia and China blocking a potential resolution on an arms embargo, countries should impose unilateral arms embargoes. Only around 40 of 193 UN members have imposed arms embargoes against the Burmese military, despite recommendations from the United Nations Fact-Finding Commission on Myanmar, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on

human rights in Myanmar, and a UN General Assembly Resolution in June this year. We call on all countries to impose unilateral arms embargoes.

More targeted economic sanctions, including gas revenue

Almost a year on from the military coup, the Burmese military is earning up to \$1.4bn in gas revenues. This money is being used to kill our people. Even countries which claim to support human rights and democracy in Burma have not stopped gas revenue, with hundreds of millions of dollars being given to the military from a gas project run by American and European Union companies Chevron and Total. We call on American President Biden and French President Macron to stop blocking sanctions on gas revenue and impose gas revenue sanctions. The European Union cannot sanction gas revenue as long as President Macron keeps blocking it.

It makes no sense to us that President Biden and President Macron have arms embargoes against the Burmese military but are still allowing their companies to give money to the military which they can then use to buy arms from Russia, China, India, Serbia, Ukraine and other countries. They won't sell arms, but they help fund the purchase of arms.

The international community has long failed to take action against the Burmese military for violations of international law committed against the Karen people. This decades long impunity has contributed to the crisis in Burma today. We hope that the international community will now finally learn lessons from past mistakes and take effective action immediately.