



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

## 2022 International Day of Peace

Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> September

Today, on September 21<sup>st</sup>, the world commemorates the International Day of Peace. This annual event is a day on which armed actors throughout the world are expected to cease hostilities for 24 hours as a celebration of the spirit of peace. Calls to cease hostilities in Burma are however currently deeply problematic. The junta's recent calls for cease-fire are likely a smokescreen to conceal their real intent of securing allies rather than true peace, and of undermining and weakening opposition groups who are fighting for concrete political reform that will end the longstanding oppression of ethnic minorities. The current context thus serves as a sad reminder that even calls for peace can be used as a weapon of war. As such, local and regional actors have been stressing the need to **hold Burma's military leaders accountable for their crimes as the clearest means to bring about peace and end the violence** committed against those striving for democracy.

Since February 2021, when the Burma Army (or Tatmadaw) once again violently and unlawfully seized control over the country, villagers in Southeast Burma have been **increasingly subjected to a vast array of human rights violations**, including arbitrary arrests, torture, killing, extortion, looting, burning of entire villages, and forced labour, as well as being used as human shields. The military junta has also returned to a "four cuts" strategy (*pyat lay pyat*) aimed to destroy links between their opponents and sources of funding, supplies, intelligence, and recruits from local villages by directly targeting civilians. This was first used against the Karen in the 1970s, and was also deployed in Rakhine State in 2017, against the Rohingya. As a result, **villagers in Karen State are being denied the most basic human necessities, including food, health care and education, and are struggling to survive.**

This year's theme, "End Racism. Build Peace," serves as a reminder that lasting peace is achieved not only through the absence of violent conflict but through the elimination of structures of violence, including ethnic and racial discrimination. **The Burma Army has been oppressing ethnic minorities throughout Burma for decades**, not just through its *four cuts* strategy, but also through a heavy Burmanisation campaign that sought to suppress the culture, language, history, and ethnic expression of minority groups. Due to ongoing and widespread problems of impunity, the Burma Army has been able to extend its tyranny and oppression to include all civilians who oppose its dictatorial rule. The ongoing failure of the international community to adequately respond to the atrocities committed against Burma's ethnic minorities thus perpetuates the structures that fuel oppression and conflict.

On this day that people across the globe are called upon to observe a "minute of silence" or "moment of peace", KHRG hopes that everyone will reflect on the fact that **for many people in Burma, and others currently facing oppression and war, enjoying a "minute of silence" and "moment of peace" is not even possible.** Thus, in commemoration of this International Day of Peace, KHRG urges all relevant international actors to take concrete action to address the human rights violations in Burma by holding accountable the military junta leaders for their past and current crimes. In remembering the shared responsibility of all local, regional and international actors in bringing about peace, **let this Day of Peace serve as a turning point for ending impunity and dismantling the structures that support ongoing violence and oppression.**