



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Statement on International Day to Protect Education from Attack

9th September 2023

On this day, September 9th, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) calls for an end to the attack on education throughout the world and, namely, would like to draw attention to the current violence against schools in Southeast Burma. The State Administration Council (SAC) has deliberately used schools as a tool in their repertoire of tactics to create fear and subordinate Karen people. We stand in solidarity with students and teachers to condemn the targeting of schools as a means of military strategy. While KHRG seeks the complete stop of all violence in this conflict, we particularly demand an immediate halt in the targeting of innocent children who are just trying to complete their education.

Since the military coup in 2021, KHRG has documented over 24 attacks, damaging or destroying over 37 education-related buildings. There are likely many more unaccounted for. We are disheartened to see that as each year passes, the attacks on education have only increased. It is 9 months into 2023, and we have had more violence than the last two years combined. The military junta has demonstrated an abject lack of care or empathy in the conflict: children in rural villages throughout Southeast Burma are placed in the crossfire of a deadly campaign of terror. However, these attacks on schools are not unique to the region, because they are occurring throughout the country. In Sagaing region, SAC airstrikes barraged a township school, killing 12 children and injuring over 30 more. Due to the continued violence against education, the SAC has succeeded in ingraining a deep sense of fear among students, teachers, and parents. Many students within attacked villages, and neighboring ones, have expressed reluctance to attend school for fear they will become the next target of the junta. In the long-term, the increased violence on schools will undoubtedly stymie academic attainment in a region that has already been struggling to provide education. SAC's strategy is threefold: damage areas of the perceived opposition, weaken morale, and worsen education in Southeast Burma.

The blatant attack on schools is in direct violation of multiple United Nations treaties which Burma is party to, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Optional Protocol to the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It also violates International Humanitarian Law. Further action must be taken at the international and regional level to stop the military junta from targeting civilians. While we laude the criminal complaint in Germany and new Western sanctions against the SAC, there needs to be more pressure. The SAC has committed atrocious crimes and must be held accountable. Students, most of which are under the age of 18, should not be, by any measure, a part of this conflict.

While the situation continues to grow dire, KHRG expresses gratitude to the community-based organizations providing essential humanitarian aid and education to students. These efforts must scale up with increased foreign support and cooperation but still with CBOs leading the way. Schools are a place for learning, exploration, and development. Violence and fear should never replace that.

Recommendations

On the International Day to End the Attack on Education, KHRG,

- Implores INGOs to direct and increase humanitarian aid for children to community-based organizations and civil society organizations.
- Requests that INGOs consult and include local actors and communities regarding the humanitarian response to provide education, protect students and teachers, and safeguard educational institutions.
- Call upon neighboring countries to allow cross-border aid to CBOs and CSOs.
- Urges the UN and countries with universal jurisdiction to hold SAC officials accountable for their crimes against humanity and the infringement of the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol.

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