



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Statement on International Human Rights Day 2023

10th December 2023

On this International Human Rights Day, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reaffirms its unwavering commitment to human rights and stands in solidarity with the people of Burma. The Burma Army, now under the leadership of the State Administration Council (SAC), continues to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other forms of human rights abuses in Southeast Burma with total impunity. While acknowledging the struggles faced by the people of Burma and the resilience they have demonstrated, we call on the international community to turn their attention to the dire human rights situation in Burma and jointly take concrete actions to end the military junta's cruel abuses.

Since the February 2021 coup, the military junta has resumed its attacks on civilians, ranging from destruction of property, looting, and extortion to arbitrary arrest, torture, and killings. They have returned to the use of the "four cuts" approach in Southeast Burma as well as in other parts of the country: in trying to prevent food, funds, information, and recruits from reaching armed resistance forces, villagers are denied access to food sources, aid, movement, trade, and travel. Many civilians have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured, and killed over alleged connections to resistance forces or participation in civil or military resistance. Burma Army soldiers have also committed the crime of enforced disappearances. Some of the forcibly disappeared civilians, including women and children, are used as porters, navigators, human shields, and, at times, even as minesweepers. Women and young girls are subjected to severe abuse, including sexual violence. Burma military, including commanders, who had already been identified as the perpetrators of systematic sexual and gender-based violence throughout Southeast Burma, continue to enjoy total impunity.

Since the 2021 coup, the military junta has also escalated its attacks against civilians across the country through indiscriminate shelling and air strikes that have resulted in numerous injuries and deaths. Moreover, these attacks have destroyed critical public infrastructure, including schools, clinics, hospitals, and religious buildings. According to KHRG documentation, this year alone the military junta has conducted at least 95 airstrikes, resulting in more than 134 casualties, and 249 shelling attacks, resulting in more than 384 casualties, in Southeast Burma. These ongoing human rights abuses against civilians, and the ongoing open conflict, have also created mass displacement of civilian populations and led to a humanitarian crisis in the country. Meanwhile, the military junta continues to deny, destroy and confiscate lifesaving humanitarian assistance in many areas in Southeast Burma.

To address the critical human rights situation and humanitarian crisis in Burma, it is crucial to acknowledge their root cause. Unless the international community is willing to listen to the people of Burma and collaboratively take strong and decisive actions to stop junta leaders and hold them accountable for the vast array of abuses they continue to commit, the suffering of civilians in the

country will persist. On this International Human Rights Day, KHRG urges international stakeholders and foreign governments to:

- Acknowledge that the military junta is the root cause of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis, as well as the reason for massive displacement in Burma.
- Refrain from giving any legitimacy to the junta, including by signing agreements with them and inviting them to events.
- Refrain from engaging in any form of collaboration with the junta, including military and economic collaboration, that will help them to continue their cruel human rights abuses against civilians.
- Support coordinated and targeted sanctions on the supply of aviation fuel to the junta, and oil and gas revenues, as well as sanctions against junta officials.
- Support current investigations and proceedings to prosecute junta leaders and seek out all additional opportunities to hold the Burma military accountable for its vast array of crimes.
- Support local community-based and civil society organisations (CBOs/CSOs) and individual human rights defenders in their effort to advocate for the protection and promotion of human rights in the country.
- Prioritise and strengthen methods of emergency relief and service delivery that rely on local CSO/CBOs and ethnic service providers that have the ability and networks for local implementation of support programmes.
- Support self-funded and ethnic-run schools and education programmes by directing funding to local service providers and CSO/CBOs.
- Collaborate with local CBOs/CSOs to develop comprehensive supporting systems for survivors of human rights violations in the country.

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