



## Statement on 2024 International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

On this *International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict*, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) stresses the serious harm inflicted by armed actors committing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in Southeast Burma, and its profound impact on local communities. Today, KHRG calls on the international community and relevant stakeholders to condemn the dire human rights situation in Burma, to take decisive action to end the abuses perpetrated against civilians, including by protecting them from sexual violence, and to stand in solidarity with survivors, their families, and those who support them.

Conflict-related sexual violence, used as a tactic of war and torture, both in areas of active fighting and in the broader theatre of war, is a heinous crime and a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. It has devastating physical, sexual, reproductive, and mental health consequences for survivors and destroys the social fabric of communities. Often, victims/survivors, more commonly women and girls, do not report the incident nor they seek medical care due to fear, stigma or prevailing insecurity. Survivors and their families face many challenges, including coping with physical injuries, psychological impacts, high medical costs, and livelihood challenges.<sup>1</sup> Villagers in Southeast Burma have experienced decades of violent attacks, including the use of CRSV, by the State Administration Council (SAC) and the Border Guard Force (BGF).<sup>2</sup> The perpetrators enjoy total impunity and have never faced prosecution for their crimes. As such, the very presence of Burma Army soldiers in and near villages generates insecurity for female villagers, leading many to send young women into hiding when Burma Army soldiers are nearby.<sup>3</sup>

CRSV is also being committed since the 2021 coup. In March 2023, a SAC sergeant of Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #340 sexually abused his 7-year-old stepdaughter at a SAC army camp in Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District. The girl, who lived with her mother and the perpetrator in the army camp reported that she had been abused by the sergeant several times before, in the absence of her mother. Before the daughter disclosed the abuse, the victim's mother was unaware of her husband's crime. Living in the military camp, the family was afraid of the sounds of shelling, had difficulty in getting food, and did not feel safe reporting the crime to SAC authorities. Finally, with the assistance of local KNU leaders from the village tract, the mother and her two daughters were able to leave the SAC army camp and return to their

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG, *Suffering in silence? Sexual violence against women in Southeast Myanmar*, December 2018; KHRG, *Undeniable: War crimes, crimes against humanity and 30 years of villagers' testimonies in rural Southeast Burma*, December 2022.

<sup>2</sup> UN Secretary-General, *2024 Annual Report on Conflict-related Sexual Violence*, S/2024/292, April 2024, Annex, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> KHRG, *Human, Not for Shield: Attack on civilians in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, April 22nd to May 22nd 2022*, December 2022.

village, in April 2023. No action has been taken against the perpetrator, as the incident remained unreported to SAC authorities.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of impunity, of knowing that a Burma Army soldier can commit rape and other acts of sexual violence, and not be punished, feeds the pathology that keeps this problem terrible and growing. According to the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC), emerging concerns and trends related to conflict-related sexual violence include the strategic use of violence in the selective targeting of victims.<sup>5</sup> The fear of sexual violence is a significant motive for displacement among villagers in Southeast Burma, and the threat of sexual violence continues to serve as a driver, hindering the return of communities, especially in the absence of accountability for this crime.<sup>6</sup> CRSV cases are widely underreported and there is still a significant lack of support for the long-term effects of trauma.<sup>7</sup> Mental health and psychosocial support interventions are essential components of a comprehensive package of care aimed at protecting or promoting psychosocial well-being and/or preventing or treating mental disorders in survivors of sexual violence.<sup>8</sup> Today, KHRG also praises the efforts made in this direction by local civil society and non-governmental organisations, including the Karen Women Organisation (KWO), and we advocate that further international support should be made available for them to enhance the effectiveness of these services.

On this day, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024, KHRG condemns the crimes of sexual nature being used by the Burma Army, which pose a grave threat to civilians' safety, dignity and lives. We reaffirm our commitment to and solidarity with survivors whose rights have been denied. Therefore, KHRG urges:

- All relevant regional and international actors to take immediate action to bring to justice in international courts and tribunals those military leaders in Burma who have ordered, instigated, permitted or condoned conflict-related sexual violence;
- Local actors to continue and expand their work for the benefit of survivors of CRSV and their communities, including by providing medical and psychological services to trauma survivors, and by addressing the stigma and discrimination that may arise within local communities;
- The international community and humanitarian actors to deepen their engagement with local civil society organisations and support them in strengthening programmes to implement appropriate and effective long-term support services for victims of sexual violence and their families.

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<sup>4</sup> KHRG, [Mu Traw District Incident Report: An SAC sergeant sexually abused a 7-year-old child in an army camp, March 2023](#), Incident Report, 9 November 2023.

<sup>5</sup> UN Secretary-General, [2024 Annual Report on Conflict-related Sexual Violence](#), S/2024/292, April 2024, para. 17.

<sup>6</sup> UN OSRSG-SVC, [Current trends and emerging concerns](#), webpage [last accessed 13 June 2024]

<sup>7</sup> UN Secretary-General, [2024 Annual Report on Conflict-related Sexual Violence](#), S/2024/292, April 2024, para. 54.

<sup>8</sup> REDRESS Trust and Global Survivors Fund (GSF), [Myanmar Study on Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence: Beyond Survival](#), March 2023, p.28ff.