



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Statement on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

25 November 2024

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) shines a spotlight on the devastating violence faced by women and girls in Southeast Burma, and the far-reaching impacts this violence has on their communities. KHRG urges the international community and all relevant stakeholders to move beyond words of condemnation and take decisive action to end the abuses perpetrated against women and girls, and to address the urgent need for gender-specific protection and support. We stand in solidarity with survivors, their families, and all those working tirelessly to support them.

Since the military coup in 2021, women in Burma have borne the brunt of a widespread and systematic campaign of violence and oppression. Direct and indiscriminate attacks, compounded by the denial of basic services and life-saving humanitarian aid, have left women struggling with profound physical and psychological harm, heightened vulnerability, and an overwhelming burden of caregiving in a context of armed conflict and dwindling resources. A member of the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW), described the physical and emotional sensations she experienced while hiding in a bunker during an air strike on her village, Wo---, in Khaw Hpoh Pleh village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, on March 23, 2024: *“During the incident when I was running, I couldn’t breathe well. My hands and legs were shaking and becoming numb. Afterwards, I told my sister that if the aircraft came again, I would die just because of hearing the noise, not because I was hit by the shrapnel. There were two aunties [honorific for middle-aged women] in the village who went into shock due to the air strike. It is also difficult for us to find a doctor. We can only help them by massaging [them]. The children were also afraid. Whenever the children heard the sound of air strikes, they just started running. I worry that children will become traumatised.”*¹

Women are disproportionately impacted by these challenges, with pregnant women, children, and the elderly facing significant protection gaps. Displacement forces many women to give birth in forests or live in unsafe, makeshift shelters that provide little protection against harsh weather. A displaced villager from Day Bu Noh area, Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District, explained: *“Villagers faced difficulties during the rainy season. Some villagers slept on hammocks, and some slept in caves as well as makeshift bunkers bedded with mats and blankets. It’s been difficult for the pregnant women and mothers who have newly given birth to travel back and forth to the village from the displacement site. It’s really difficult for them to live in the forest because it is not*

¹ KHRG, ကဘီယူဟဲလံ Aircraft coming! : Impacts of air strikes on local communities and villagers’ protection strategies in Southeast Burma since the 2021 coup, November 2024, p. 43.

like home.” The lack of prenatal and postnatal care, compounded by the displacement of healthcare workers and insufficient resources, leaves women and newborns at heightened risk.²

Women’s roles as caregivers have become even more precarious as they navigate the loss of homes and livelihoods due to air strikes, which leave entire families displaced and destitute. Women are frequently left to shoulder the dual responsibilities of caregiving and breadwinning, often with no access to support networks or economic opportunities. KHRG’s documentation underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the gendered impacts of this conflict. Women’s voices and leadership must be at the forefront of any response, and the international community must prioritize the provision of comprehensive support services, including healthcare, safe shelter, and trauma-informed care for survivors.

The strength and resilience of women and girls in Southeast Burma are undeniable. Despite the immense challenges they face, local leaders, civil society groups, and community-based organizations, including women-led organization such as Karen Women Organization (KWO), continue to work tirelessly to mitigate the impacts of violence and displacement. However, their efforts cannot fully succeed without international solidarity and action.

Violence against women is not just a women’s issue; it is a human rights issue. On this day, we reaffirm our commitment to amplifying the voices of women in Southeast Burma and advocating for a future where all can live free from violence, fear, and oppression. KHRG urges international stakeholders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and regional and foreign governments to:

- Acknowledge that the SAC is the cause of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis, and refrain from giving any legitimacy to the junta.
- Hold the perpetrators of violence against women and girls in Burma accountable for their actions through international mechanisms and investigations.
- Implement further sanctions against SAC officials, aviation fuel and arms and ammunition suppliers to weaken the junta’s ability to continue its attacks on villages and schools.
- Provide the necessary resources to address women’s specific needs, including healthcare, psychological and social support, safe shelters, and economic empowerment programs.
- Coordinate with local civil society and community-based organizations (CSO/CBOs) to strengthen their capacity for humanitarian assistance and to implement local solutions in support of women and their communities.

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² KHRG, ကဘီယူဟဲလံ Aircraft coming!, p. 55.