



25 YEARS OF FEMINIST FEDERALISM

*STORIES OF STRENGTHENING
ETHNIC DIVERSITY FOR CHANGE*





WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA

The Women's League of Burma (WLB), founded on 9 December 1999, is an umbrella organization comprising 12 women's organizations representing diverse ethnic, political, and historical backgrounds. WLB envisions building a federal democratic union grounded in justice, peace, gender equality, political participation, and ethnic equality. Declared a political organization in 2002, its mission includes dismantling dictatorial systems to achieve peace, reconciliation, and federal democracy.

Fostering a peaceful and just society, WLB's objectives are to empower women and to advance their status, promote meaningful participation of women in politics and decision-making processes at all levels, and eliminate violence and all forms of discrimination against women.

Guided by the values of peace, justice, equality, and respect, as well as principles of unity in diversity, accountability, and responsibility, WLB continues working toward a federal democratic union in Burma, ensuring women play a vital role in shaping the nation's future.

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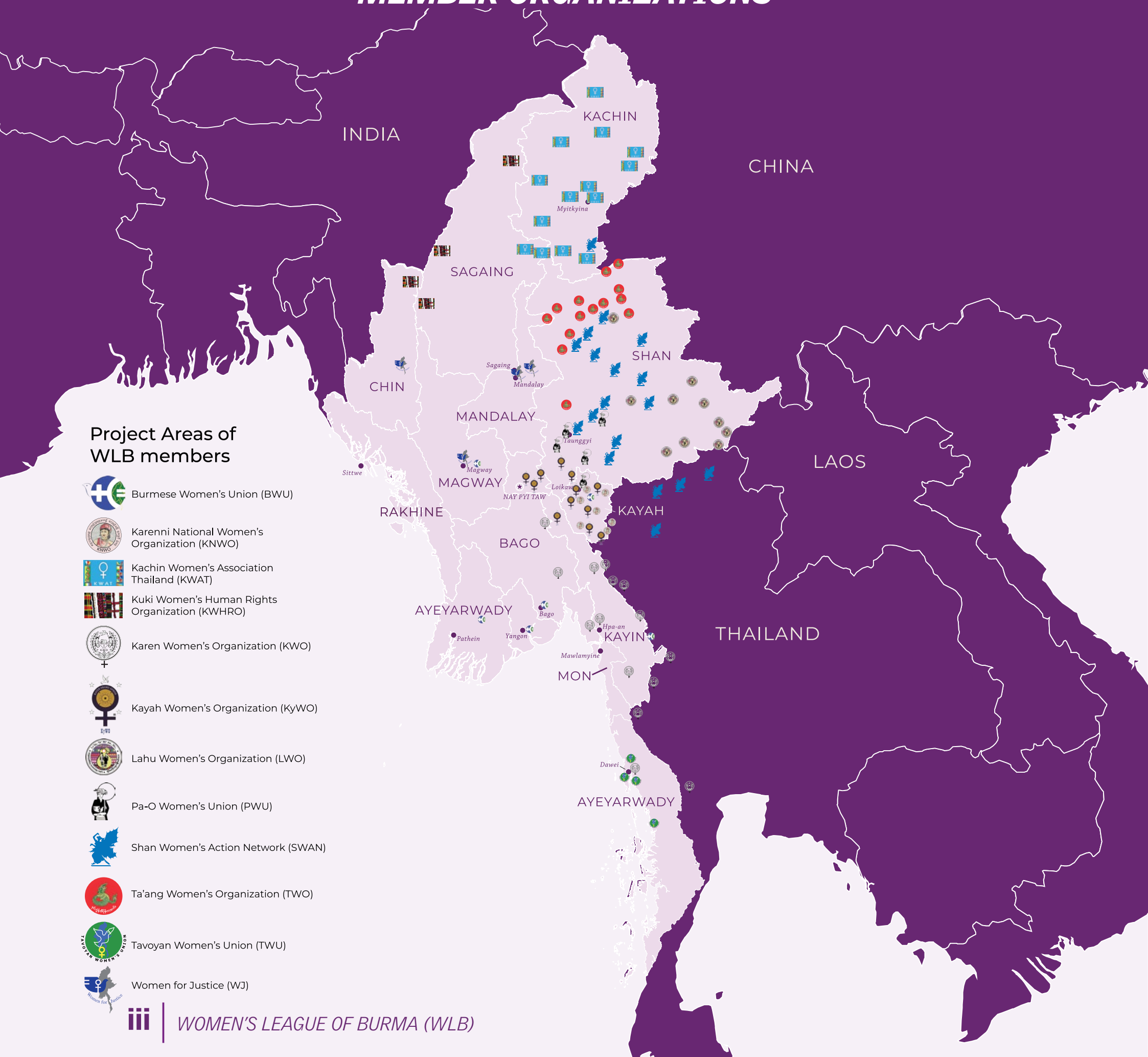
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our gratitude to Phyu Phyu Sann of Cetana Consulting as well as Michelle Onello and Margaret Wiggins of the Global Justice Center for generously taking time from their busy schedules to provide technical assistance in the development of this report.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABSDF	All Burma Students' Democratic Front	LDU	Lahu Democratic Union
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development	LWO	Lahu Women's Organisation
APWW	Asia Pacific Women's Watch	MPC	Myanmar Peace Center
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation	NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
BRC	Burma Relief Centre	NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team
BWU	Burmese Women's Union	NCUB	National Council of the Union of Burma
CAM	CEDAW Action Myanmar	NGO	Non-governmental Organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women	NRP	National Reconciliation Program
CRSV	Conflict Related Sexual Violence	NUCC	National Unity Consultative Council
CRR	Centre for Refugee Research	NUG	National Unity Government
CSO	Civil Society Organization	PIAT	Political Initiatives and Advocacy Team
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women	PNFC	Pa-O National Federal Council
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma	PWU	Pa-O Women's Union
ERO	Ethnic Resistance Organization	RFA	Radio Free Asia
FCDCC	Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee	SWAN	Shan Women's Action Network
FDC	Federal Democracy Charter	TCWG	Transitional Constitution Working Group
GBV	Gender-based Violence	TWO	Ta'ang Women's Organization
GJC	Global Justice Center	TWU	Tavoyan Women's Union
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency	UKSY	Union of Karenni State Youth
IWRAW-AP	International Women's Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific	UN	United Nations
ICC	International Criminal Court	UNA	United Nationalities Alliance
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
JCC	Joint Coordination Committee	UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
KNWO	Karenni National Women's Organisation	UNLD (LA)	United Nationalities League for Democracy – Liberated Areas
KNU	Karen National Union	UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
KSCC	Karenni State Consultative Council	UPC	Union Peace Conference
KWAT	Kachin Women's Association Thailand	VOA	Voice of America
KWO	Karen Women's Organization	WCAR	World Conference Against Racism
KyWO	Kayan Women's Organization	WLB	Women's League of Burma
		WON	Women's Organizations Network

MAP OF WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS



Project Areas of WLB members

-  Burmese Women's Union (BWU)
-  Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO)
-  Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)
-  Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO)
-  Karen Women's Organization (KWO)
-  Kayah Women's Organization (KyWO)
-  Lahu Women's Organization (LWO)
-  Pa-O Women's Union (PWU)
-  Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN)
-  Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO)
-  Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU)
-  Women for Justice (WJ)

MESSAGE FROM THE WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) was born from a shared vision—a commitment to justice, equality, and a federal democratic union. Over 25 years, WLB has evolved into a pillar of feminist federalism, uniting women from diverse ethnic and political backgrounds in a shared struggle for dignity and rights. The personal stories of our sisters contained in this publication are a demonstration of our resilience as well as a call to continue the journey toward peace, equality, and accountability.

The path has not been easy. From the margins of society—conflict zones, refugee camps, and exile—WLB has confronted immense challenges. Limited resources, gender-based violence, and systematic human rights violations have tested our commitment. Yet, these adversities have also strengthened our determination. Through resilience and solidarity, we have navigated these barriers, empowering women to lead within their communities and on the national stage.

Our herstory reflects the power of resilience. When WLB was founded in 1999, it brought together 12 women's organizations, each rooted in unique cultural and political experiences. The decision to declare WLB a political organization in 2002 was groundbreaking, establishing women as key actors in peacebuilding and governance. Over the decades, we have successfully advocated for women's participation in political spaces, including achieving critical milestones such as gender quotas in legislative processes. We, WLB, have stood firm in our belief that dismantling societal patriarchal systems that lead to

gender inequality is as vital as ending military dictatorship. Equally significant is WLB's international advocacy. By amplifying local voices globally, we have drawn attention to the plight of the women of Burma, holding perpetrators accountable through international mechanisms. From submissions to the UN CEDAW Committee to organizing the International Tribunal on Crimes Against the Women of Burma, we have positioned ourselves as a force for justice and accountability.

The voices of women across generations, told through personal stories, are evidence of resistance, resolve, and resilience during our 25 year journey. These narratives showcase our achievements and lessons learned, highlighting the evolution of WLB into a platform where women flourish. From grassroots mobilization to high-level political advocacy, our collective efforts demonstrate the transformative power of feminist federalism.

As we envision the next 25 years, our commitment remains firm. We will continue to advocate for a federal democratic union grounded in gender equality, ethnic diversity, and justice. This journey is made possible through the unwavering support of our allies—feminist networks, political movements, and international organizations. To our friends, supporters, and partners: thank you for walking alongside us from the beginning.

WLB's story is not only ours but also an inspiration for all who believe in equality, justice, and collective action. Together, we can build a future where women are not just participants but leaders shaping a society free of oppression, conflict, and inequality. May these personal stories serve as a reminder of our shared responsibility to forge ahead in solidarity and hope for the future.

The Women's League of Burma
December 2024

OUR HERSTORY

Throughout Burma's decades of struggle for ethnic self-determination and democracy, women had little opportunity to play a meaningful role in politics, let alone champion women's rights. One major stumbling block was that women working to achieve gender equality came from different backgrounds and ethnicities and had varying experiences, making it challenging to unite in a formal alliance.

Before the 1988 uprising against the military's totalitarian dictatorship, few ethnic women's organizations were active in Burma. Following those mass protests, more women's groups in exile began to organize in response to the military's oppressive regime and the gender-based threats and violence it perpetuated. These women's groups aimed to amplify the voices of women who were discriminated against, excluded, marginalized, and silenced. They believed that achieving a peaceful,

equal, and just society would be possible only with women's equal participation in politics and decision-making. This was necessary to create a more inclusive and representative society.

As a result, in December 1999, existing women's groups from different areas of Burma bordering Bangladesh, India, and Thailand for the first time united their efforts to strengthen their impact. Despite many differences, they all believed that working together could achieve much more for women in Burma. Uniting would bring many benefits, including gaining knowledge, experience, and ideas from other members and generating positive energy from working together with other motivated women. This groundbreaking, newly-forged feminist coalition of 12 women's organizations with different ethnic and political backgrounds became the Women's League of Burma (WLB).

OUR CORE SHARED VALUES

Our member organizations commit to six core shared values: mutual respect and non-discrimination; defending women's human right to be free from all forms of violence; upholding principles of democracy and equality; committing to accountability and transparency; advancing gender equality; and supporting peaceful co-existence and an end to conflict in Burma.

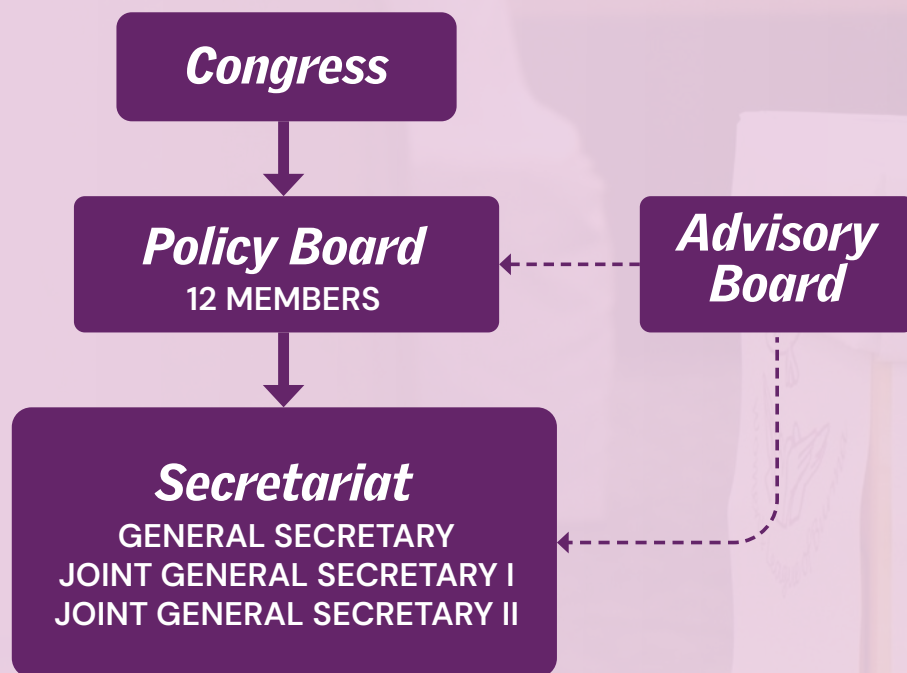
These core values are reflected in our organizational constitution, adopted in 2001 by a congress comprising 28 representatives from our 12 member organizations. As a result of a collaborative and consultative process, our constitution also established three organizational goals and programmatic areas to guide our work: women's political empowerment and increased participation across all spheres of society, combatting gender-based violence, and promoting women's participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

Our constitution thus created an umbrella structure in which each individual member organization continues to work in its own respective specialty areas while participating in our collective efforts. As a league, we are committed to preserving the independence of each member organization and its freedom to pursue individual objectives within our united guiding framework, striking a balance between centralized coordination and independent latitude of action for our members.

To help achieve our shared vision, in 2002 we declared ourselves to be a political organization. After decades of civil war, we believed it essential for women to be involved in peacebuilding, governance, and development in society.

OUR GOVERNANCE

Our leadership comprises a Congress, a Policy Board (formerly known as a Presidium Board), a Secretariat, and Program Coordinators. Congress meetings include an equal number of representatives from each member organization, selected by each member organization. The Policy Board is similarly composed of one representative of each member organization, who acts as a liaison between WLB and her respective organization. We operate with a strong feminist commitment to equal inclusion and participation by each member; any decisions by Congress or the Policy Board must be approved by consensus of at least seventy-five percent of the representatives.



OUR CAPACITY-BUILDING ROLE

We seek to foster equal capacity among all members, strengthen unity, and ensure organizational effectiveness in achieving our goals. To successfully implement programs and prepare our members for political engagement, we have dedicated significant resources and time to member capacity-building, which has been hindered by a lack of educational opportunities for women.

To build capacity, we organize workshops and short trainings to raise awareness or develop skills on particular topics, run internship programs, and conduct six-month political empowerment courses for women from each member organization. We have also paid attention to organizational development, hosting strategic workshops to equalize the capacity of our member organizations.

Over the past 25 years, our focus on capacity-building has equipped member organizations with knowledge and skills and enabled emerging women leaders to secure decision-making roles in civil society, ethnic resistance organizations, and political institutions. Through our commitment to capacity-building, we have become more powerful agents of

social change and leadership.

Twenty-five years since its formation, our feminist vision has united women activists across different generations, ethnicities, and life experiences behind shared goals. In addition to increasing coordination and amplifying impact across member initiatives, we have created a supportive network of women activists fostering sisterhood across all ages and backgrounds, sharing expertise, resources, and mentorship among sister groups to achieve common goals. The value of working as a league has been a source of energy and strength in overcoming the many challenges we have faced during these critical years.

This unity of purpose has maintained and strengthened the alliance for 25 years and made us a crucial voice promoting women's human rights and gender equality. Across generations, we have proven that collaboration between different ethnicities is not only possible but powerful. Our example can serve as a model for ongoing efforts to build a just, peaceful, and equal federal democracy in Burma.

A group of women are gathered in a meeting, some looking at a document held by one of the women in the foreground. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple color. The text is centered over the group.

RESISTING PATRIARCHY AND INJUSTICE THROUGH RESILIENCE

In our 25 years of activism, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) has successfully built a nationwide campaign for women's political engagement and participation in national peace processes. Through our collaborative structure, WLB has unified women activists from a variety of backgrounds, creeds, and ethnicities in a groundbreaking feminist coalition of 12 different women's organizations. WLB mobilizes women across the country around three key issue areas: gendering political spaces, advocating for justice and accountability at the international level, and feminist movement building.

A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a dark t-shirt and pants, stands on a stage at night, speaking into a microphone. The background is filled with blurred figures of people and warm, ambient lighting, suggesting a public gathering or protest.

GENDERING POLITICAL SPACES

In the area of political engagement, WLB has forged a place for women's voices in national peace processes. WLB secured representation in the Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee (FCDCC), and successfully lobbied for the inclusion of a provision for at least 30% women's representation in the legislative branch. In country-wide peace dialogues with ethnic resistance organizations (EROs), WLB has established itself as a trusted voice for the needs of women at the community level. At both local and national levels, WLB has tackled traditionally patriarchal spaces of governance, and brought women's lived needs and experiences to the forefront of peace negotiations. WLB recognizes that ending the military dictatorship in Burma is as vital as dismantling patriarchy and combatting all forms of gender-based violence or discrimination.

The following personal stories shared by our sisters from WLB member organizations highlight our experiences, accomplishments, and challenges throughout our 25 years advocating for women's participation in traditionally male-dominated political spheres.



Thin Thin Aung

Thin Thin Aung has been active in WLB since its formation in 1999, and is a founder of Women for Justice, formerly known as the Women's Rights & Welfare Association of Burma. She has since held various leadership positions within WLB including Joint General Secretary (1), Presidium Board Member, and an Advisory Board Member.

When we formed WLB in 1999, the women's groups involved had diverse backgrounds, interests, and areas of focus. Some women's organizations were involved in the social sector, working on cultural preservation, women's economic development, and providing vocational training like weaving courses to help improve women's livelihoods. Other women's groups were already more politically active, including women who had previously been involved with a communist party and EROs: Ethnic Resistance Organizations. Additionally, groups led by women students and activists, who had been actively engaged in the 8888 Democracy Uprising in 1988 and continued to work for democracy, also joined. In the early days, there were language barriers, and it wasn't easy to communicate among us. When exchanging ideas and discussing what each group was doing, we became more aware of diversity among the groups. Some were not particularly interested in politics, and some were not yet politically involved.

However, over time, these diverse perspectives were brought together. Through the exchange of experiences, ideas and ideology, all member organizations of the WLB accepted by

the year 2000 that we women needed to be involved in politics. Women refugees and IDPs were suffering and facing violence, and in order to address these issues, it was necessary for women to take part in leadership, decision-making, and policy-setting positions. So, we started advocating for the importance of our involvement in politics as an umbrella group.

Before the formation of WLB in 1999, opposition groups and ethnic resistance forces existed in liberated areas, but we women were not considered to be part of them. After WLB was formed, we women came together in a more organized manner and began pushing for participation in politics as WLB. By 2002, we publicly declared the WLB itself as a political organization. This was a significant internal decision. Later, in 2003 and 2004, women's representatives from WLB were invited to political meetings and discussions organized by opposition forces and alliance groups.

While we continued to participate in political meetings, there was a series of seminars for drafting a Federal Constitution for the future of Burma among various political bodies, including

UNLD (LA)¹ and NCUB². As WLB, we made strong efforts to ensure that women were included in the constitution-drafting process. In 2004, we formed a Constitution Study Team at WLB to study international constitutions and explore how women's rights and gender equality were integrated into these documents.

In 2005, WLB developed a paper from a gender perspective with support from technical experts. This was part of a year-long study. At the seminar "Future Federal Constitution of Union of Burma" held in February 2005, eight basic principles as the foundation for drafting the constitution were adopted. One of these guiding principles was "Gender Equality." The seminar also decided to form the Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee (FCDCC). We sent two representatives from WLB to the FCDCC, and the constitution drafting process officially began in March 2005.

In February 2006, WLB presented its findings and released a briefing paper titled "Constituting Our Rights," outlining how women's rights and gender equality could be embedded in the constitution.

1 United Nationalities League for Democracy – Liberated Areas

2 National Council of the Union of Burma

Our advocacy efforts continued to ensure these rights were incorporated. In April 2006, FCDCC released the first draft of the constitution, but specific provisions on gender equality were still missing. We updated the briefing paper and continued advocacy, emphasizing the importance of substantive equality and affirmative action to ensure women's participation in all branches of government: executive, legislative, and judiciary.

In late 2006, WLB secured the addition of one more woman to the 15-member drafting committee, increasing its representation to three. I was the third representative. In 2007, we continued the drafting and consultation process, and in February 2008, during the FCDCC's constitutional conference with stakeholders at Law Khee Lar, in the area controlled by the Karen National Union in the Thai-Burma border, we advocated for the inclusion of a quota of at least 30% women's participation in the federal constitution.

Despite opposition, particularly from male-dominated groups, we threatened to boycott the conference if our demands for women's representation

were not met. This pressure led to the inclusion of a provision for at least 30% of women's representation in the legislative branch. While this was seen as a victory, we continued to push for greater representation across all sectors. WLB also initiated capacity-building programs such as the Emerging Women Leaders School/Training of Future Women Political Leaders, which started in 2008. I served as the first principal of the school. By 2019, over 80 alumnae had graduated from this program.

We also used media such as DVB, BBC, RFA, and VOA to reach a wider audience inside Burma/Myanmar, gaining both recognition and support for our efforts in the women's movement.

Despite some groups viewing the inclusion of women in the constitution as a token gesture, we continued advocating for peace, substantive equality, and women's meaningful participation in ongoing political processes. After the constitutional conference, we also formed the constitution advocacy team, which met with various ethnic resistance Organizations and exiled political parties to promote the inclusion of women in decision-making roles.

Through these strategic efforts, we as WLB strengthened the presence and influence of women in the political landscape of Burma/Myanmar.



Lway Poe Ngeal

Lway Poe Ngeal has been involved with WLB since 2013. She was elected as General Secretary during WLB's Ninth Congressional term and later as Joint General Secretary (2) during the Tenth Congressional term. She is currently a team leader of WLB's Political Initiatives and Advocacy Team (PIAT) and serves on the Advisory Board for the Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO).

First, I would like to share about WLB's consistent advocacy for gender equality and women's leadership roles in political processes ever since WLB's establishment.

When WLB declared itself as a women's political organization in 2002, some of our members were actively involved in drafting state constitutions. Within WLB, we discussed strategies for women's effective participation in political processes. In 2004, we participated in a seminar on "Basic Principles for a Future Federal Constitution for Burma". This was where we successfully advocated for gender equality to be included in the basic principles of the future federal constitution of Burma: the very first significant achievement for WLB.

Subsequently, WLB representatives joined the FCDCC, and with assistance from technical experts,

we were able to include in the draft constitution a clause under Article 37, stating that "at least 30% of federal legislative seats must be held by women." This marked a major political milestone for WLB before 2010.

Later, after the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) was established,

we began approaching EROs about implementing a minimum 30 percent participation requirement for women. Most EROs accepted this principle, and it was officially included in the Single Text of the NCA during the ERO Conference in Law Khee Lar, before the signing of the 2015 EROs: Ethnic Resistance Organizations.

Two WLB representatives attended the ERO Conference as observers prior to the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) Process and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Committee (NCCT) negotiations. During this time, the NCCT presented the finalized single-text draft of the NCA. While the observers could only listen, WLB member Na Ve Bon from Lahu Women's Organization (LWO) was able to participate as the representative of the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU). Through her, WLB was able to advocate for women's inclusion. During the summit, we approached leaders of EROs in various ways, gathering support and advocating for at least 30% of women's representation. Through extensive dialogue with ERO leaders, the organizations present eventually agreed on this provision, which was included in the single-text draft—a historic success for WLB.

Following the Law Khee Lar Conference, the Senior Delegation led by Sayama Zipporah continued negotiation meetings with President U Thein Sein's government on the finalized single-text draft of the NCA and its signing. After a few months, they reported back to us about the negotiation meetings. With the upcoming NCA signing on October 2015, a summit of EROs was held in Chiang Mai to decide whether or not to sign the NCA. As an observer, WLB advocated for universal signing. Ultimately, only eight groups signed the NCA³ on October 15, 2015.

Challenges followed as we faced internal within WLB. As an organization, we had stronger ties with signatory groups, causing discussions within WLB about whether we would get involved in the NCA process. We also repeatedly debated whether we should continue pushing for at least 30 percent women's participation. After intense deliberation, we chose to participate in the peace process.

Consequently, in 2016, WLB was involved in the UPC/Union Peace Conference–21st Century Panglong, participating actively under the Civil Society Organization (CSO) Forum

platform. After the Second UPC, five WLB representatives attended an ERO Summit in Mai Jar Yan, where we advocated for women's participation based on our Peace Position paper. This was another significant milestone for WLB.

During my time as the General Secretary from 2017 to 2019, one notable experience was attending the Third Union Peace Conference (UPC) in Nay Pyi Taw, where we advocated for the principle of gender equality. Ethnic Resistance Organizations reached out to their respective ethnic women's organizations for representation. Naw Hser Hser of the Karen Women's Organization (KWO) attended as the Karen National Union (KNU) representative. In contrast, I from Ta'ang Women's Organization (TWO) attended as a representative of the Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party. Other WLB members attended to represent their respected resistance groups. WLB also sent 14 other delegates, totaling 31 women. We all worked tirelessly, even through the night, preparing, drafting, and strategizing how to approach each discussion topic and advocate effectively in the meetings.

3 A landmark ceasefire agreement between the government of Myanmar and representatives of various ethnic resistance groups, officially known as "ethnic armed organisations" (EAOs) by the Government of Myanmar. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationwide_Ceasefire_Agreement

Moreover, we distributed WLB publications on peace, gender equality, women's rights, and reports on sexual violence. We engaged with stakeholders, political parties, and armed groups whenever possible, using a strategic approach to connect and organize. We believe our materials greatly helped raise awareness among the political parties and EROs to better understand and support our cause.

A major challenge remained: despite our women representatives' efforts and thorough preparations, final decisions still rested with male leaders. Consequently, policy outcomes often lacked the provisions we had advocated for, leaving us dissatisfied. Later, the peace process came to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup.

During my terms serving as WLB Secretary from 2017 to 2022, unforeseen events in a rapidly evolving political landscape impacted our work. Despite these changes, I have continued to serve

as a women's political representative for WLB, advocating for a future federal democratic union. In the current revolutionary period, I have been part of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) representing WLB, successfully advocating with my WLB sisters for the principle of at least 30 percent women's participation in the Federal Democracy Charter (FDC). I am also representing WLB in the Joint Coordination Committee of Strategy (JCC – Strategy) and contributed to drafting the Transitional Constitution in the Transitional Constitution Working Group (TCWG).

A key challenge remains: the minimum of 30 percent women's participation principle exists mostly on paper. While male leaders acknowledge it, there are numerous barriers to implementing it at all levels. We need to continue organizing and advocating to ensure a deeper understanding and acceptance of this policy, with real mechanisms and opportunities in place for meaningful women's participation.



Naw Hser Hser

Naw Hser Hser served as General Secretary of WLB from 2019 through 2022. She is currently a team leader for WLB's Political Initiative and Advocacy Team (PIAT), and the Advocacy Director of Karen Women's Organization (KWO).

When the military staged a coup in February 2021, I was still serving as the WLB General Secretary. I became involved in protests and strikes, as well as in supporting protection measures and humanitarian assistance for people affected in the Taungoo and Bago areas. The situation worsened daily, and I faced threats of arrest by the junta. So, I fled to Thailand on foot with my 2 year-old daughter, taking more than a week to reach a safe area. I returned to work within a few days, as other WLB colleagues, including two secretaries, were also on the run, trying to escape from Yangon. While handling an overload of work with few staff members, WLB was invited to attend the NUCC meeting alongside members of strike committees to give input to the Draft Federal Democracy Charter (FDC) before it was made public on March 31, 2021. An advisory board member and I initially attended the meeting. Later, two policy board members, two advisory board members, and I represented WLB in the NUCC meetings. Currently, Lway Poe Ngeal and I represent WLB in the NUCC as council members.

NUCC meetings were held daily from the day I joined on behalf of WLB. Alongside WLB sisters, I advocated for greater women's participation in leadership roles. I consistently reported

back to my colleagues, including the WLB technical team, policy board, and advisory board, on developments, progress, and challenges within the NUCC, then shared feedback from WLB in NUCC meetings. After WLB reviewed and revised points raised by the NUCC, new discussions emerged about what to include in the FDC.

It has been challenging to raise our voices in the male-dominated NUCC setting. However, WLB seized the opportunity to engage with male counterparts, demonstrating our skills and experience across various emerging political platforms.

Despite WLB reaffirming itself as a political women's organization after the coup, many men remained reluctant to accept women in these discussions. They often tried to undermine women's agency and political knowledge, suggesting that women's groups are merely members of civil society. We had to assert ourselves constantly, as meetings were often delayed due to disagreements, particularly regarding gender. Criticism regarding the expansion of women's participation and perspectives continues. Some men in the NUCC and National Unity Government (NUG), adhering to traditional and cultural norms, were not

pleased with WLB's approach, criticizing us for not "behaving" and for daring to speak out and demand what we want.

For us, ending the military dictatorship in Burma is as vital as dismantling patriarchy and any form of dominance against the people. These have been our goals from the beginning, with zero tolerance for violence.

We have experienced discrimination, been looked down upon, and faced a lack of recognition for our contributions. This dominant narrative, held primarily by men, has often sought to exclude women's organizations. However, we women's groups work for all people, and our views are rooted in decades of experience. Despite this, we continue to face questions and debate about the validity of our contributions.

WLB recognizes opportunities amidst these challenges while representing WLB in the NUCC as council members. This was the first time WLB could critically engage on political matters related to Burma on a daily basis, presenting feminist views to top leaders within various EROs and political stakeholders. This was also the first

time a women's group was asked to share women's perspectives and gender considerations. As the NUCC evolved, WLB continuously raised awareness of the gender perspective within the federalism framework. Although several representatives at NUCC and NUG had worked on governance and federalism for a long time, they had limited exposure to gender dynamics, especially within the post-coup context.

As part of WLB, I advocated for and amended policies to strengthen our common position, recognize women's leadership, and prioritize gender perspectives in political engagement. This includes the call for at least 30 percent of women's participation in decision-making roles in the FDC. We reviewed the FDC to ensure that at least 30 percent representation was included at every decision-making level.

This process was not easy. There were many challenges, including over two months of debates on whether to include a framework in the FDC mandating at least 30 percent women's participation in all sectors. WLB worked to exceed this agreement, pushing past a lack of political will and striving for meaningful participation. Overcoming Burma's deep-rooted patriarchal norms remains a significant challenge.

In addition to the NUCC platform, WLB has expanded its work to other political groups, to observe how they view the evolution of the federal democratic union. These efforts establish connections for mutual understanding, further collaboration, and engagement.

WLB has maintained connections with different political groups, including NUCC platforms, where our member organizations are actively involved in leadership positions. This is one of WLB's most significant achievements, and we continue to excel despite the challenging circumstances. This extends to women's and ethnic groups. It is also apparent that many groups, even state-based and ethnic-based groups, are starting to draft gender frameworks for political and institutional management, and other groups are considering them and implementing them. While this is an important step forward, establishing these foundations continues to be challenging.

At the end of 2022, WLB reaffirmed that we are a political women's organization, and released our political declaration dedicated to women's political advancement and empowerment. We encourage women to have greater autonomy in making decisions at various levels of the political process. Several groups have adopted gender-sensitive codes of conduct and consulted with women's organizations, including WLB, to provide input. We continue to engage with other networks to take action based on the evolving political situation. Despite the ongoing security concerns, criticism, and discrimination, I notably will never stop challenging these harmful assumptions.

There are and always will be women where vital work is needed in Burma.

During my term as General Secretary from 2019 to 2022, WLB received five international awards⁴, recognizing our work and sacrifices. These are unforgettable milestones.

4 2019: Human Rights Tulip Myanmar 2019 Award by Government of the Netherland
2020: The Janet Benshoof Global Justice Award by Global Justice Center (GJC), USA
2021: The Judith Lee Stronach Award by Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA), USA
2021: Sir Ronal Wilson Award by the Australian Council For International Development (ACFID), Australia
2022: Women Peace and Security Award by Strategy for Humanity, USA



Na Ve Bon

Na Ve Bon has been involved with WLB for more than 20 years. She is currently serving her second term as a Policy Board member, and also holds the position of General Secretary for Lahu Women's Organization (LWO).

I would like to share my experiences participating in political developments post-2010. In 2011, President Thein Sein invited the political organizations in exile to come back and support the country's peace process. So, WLB participated in the first peace mission inside Burma/Myanmar, coordinated by officials in Thein Sein's government who arranged travel routes and security for us. When we arrived, we had the opportunity to meet with political parties based in Yangon, where we were warmly welcomed.

Back then, most Central Committee members of political parties were men, with no women in leadership roles. WLB advocated for the inclusion of women in leadership positions within every party. However, most parties still viewed WLB primarily as a women's rights group and were surprised by our involvement in discussions on political and federal issues. We explained to them that WLB was dedicated not only to women's issues but also to the country's peace, women's peace, and the safety and well-being of society. We informed them that we also worked on humanitarian concerns, addressing the country's human rights abuses at the international level. As a result, they recognized our efforts. However, we still didn't feel fully

acknowledged as a central part of the country's decision-making process.

During this peace mission, we also met with the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) and discussed the involvement of women in the FCDCC. Around 2012-2013, UNA began inviting CSOs and youth organizations to participate in their UNA Plus meetings, which we attended as well.

I also want to talk about my experience in the peace process. For about four years, I participated in peace negotiations both at the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and at the peace negotiation table with Thein Sein's government as a woman and as a Lahu ethnic representative. During that time, I experienced significant challenges as a woman among male representatives.

UNFC was formed by various ethnic groups when President Thein Sein called for peace. Initially, UNFC did not invite WLB to their regular meetings, though we had discussions with them at their office or at the WLB office, during which we shared updates on the peace process.

When the drafting of the NCA began, UNFC held a vote on whether to invite WLB as women's representative. It was

decided not to include WLB, on the grounds that WLB's focus was women's issues, not the country's affairs. However, WLB still worked closely with UNFC during the drafting process. At first, WLB was invited only for technical assistance. While agreeing to give technical assistance, we requested that the UNFC accept us as observers at their meetings.

Over time, we saw incremental changes. WLB was invited to high-level meetings on the peace process such as the meetings in Law Khee Lar, Mai Jar Yan, Laiza, and Chiang Mai. We prepared political recommendations for each meeting. WLB was also allowed to present our recommendations at these meetings, and our views on political issues and the peace process were increasingly accepted and recognized. Eventually, UNFC accepted that WLB worked beyond women's issues, and some ethnic resistance Organizations invited WLB to their political meetings to give our recommendations.

At UNFC, I was the representative of the LDU, founded in 1973. As an armed group based on the border, it was difficult to directly work with the Lahu community inside Burma/Myanmar. To bridge the gap, LDU developed a policy to include two representatives from women's

groups and two from youth groups in their Central Committee, because women and youth groups have secretly been conducting training and workshops inside the country. Thus, I became a Central Committee member at LDU in 2012, and became actively involved at UNFC as well as at the peace negotiation table between the government and UNFC as an LDU representative for four years, until the signing of NCA.

However, I faced challenges because of gender and culture at the beginning. I was the only woman representative among men at UNFC. I often didn't feel like my voice was equally respected. Because of my age, certain male elder leaders would refer to me as "daughter" rather than treating me as a peer. Being an LDU representative at UNFC, I had to travel a lot; sometimes the trip took more than one week to attend political meetings on the peace process among EROs as well as other stakeholders. Being a mother with a young child, this was difficult for me to manage. On one trip, I requested that I be allowed to bring my child and baby-sitter with me and have all travel expenses covered, but the request was denied due to a lack of budget allocation.

At DPN (Delegation for Political Negotiation of UNFC), I was asked to talk about women's issues during the preparation meeting among the delegates before the peace negotiation meeting with Thein Sein's government.

I advocated strongly that women's issues are everybody's issues, and emphasized that women's issues must also be discussed by male representatives, regardless of gender.

When the NCA was being drafted at UNFC, WLB pushed for a minimum of 30 percent women's representation to be included in the text. Our WLB members in the delegations of EROs also lobbied for the same within EROs, and it was ultimately included in the draft. However, the wording was altered to "appropriate representation" when negotiating the text with Thein Sein's government and the military.

This is just a summary of my experiences advocating for women's representation and non-discrimination within UNFC, DPN, and the peace

negotiation processes as a woman, as a Lahu, and as WLB.

I am proud of myself for my work. I have become capable because of WLB. The organization opened a big door for me to work on women. At WLB, I learned not only about women's human rights but also about federalism, justice, and the transformative process related to women in federal political affairs. WLB empowers its members with the skills to talk about these topics.

WLB encourages us to stand firm on women's issues, to speak about our country, and to address women's human rights violations confidently, wherever we go.

WLB provides us a safe space to learn and grow as feminist activists. WLB doesn't just talk—they do a lot of work, providing evidence so that we feel both capable and brave enough to speak out. I am also committed to speaking out, because I know I must do so myself.



Maw Day Myar

Maw Day Myar joined the Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO) in 2015. She served as Joint General Secretary (2) in WLB's Ninth Congress from 2017 through 2019. She currently holds the position of General Secretary for the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC).

In 2017, at WLB's ninth Congress, I was elected as Joint General Secretary (2). During my term, we relocated the WLB Secretariat Office to Yangon. This was also a time of nationwide ceasefire and peace processes. So in addition to our regular activities, we were deeply involved in the CSO Forum, working alongside CSOs within Burma/Myanmar to support and engage in the peace process. We built relationships, fostered trust, and took a leading role in the CSO Forum, facilitating and actively participating in working committees. This involvement allowed us to have a stronger influence on the political discussions based on the NCA and to encourage the meaningful participation of women's political groups in peace negotiations. During this period, we met with many CSOs across the country, gaining valuable experience through this collaboration.

In 2019, I returned to my mother organization, the KNWO, and worked on the Peace Program. Then, in February 2021, the military seized power. Representing KNWO, I joined the strike

committee as the township strike group representative. We organized protests and strikes in Loikaw, Demoso, and Pruso, bringing together our strike committees to lead major demonstrations. However, as the violent crackdowns increased, I relocated to the KNWO office on the border, where I worked on humanitarian response, fundraising, and project implementation. In 2021-22, I focused on international advocacy, ensuring the global community was informed about the situation in our country. I attended numerous advocacy meetings, panels, and events.

In April 2021, when the KSCC⁵ was formed, I represented KNWO within the KSCC. Throughout 2021-22, we worked to establish the KSCC as an institution. When the KSCC held its first congress in 2023, I attended as a representative of KNWO and was elected as the General Secretary. I have now served in this role for over a year.

Navigating the current political landscape as a woman has been challenging.

5 A state-based body managing the interim state-level legislative, lawmaking, executive, administration, and judicial governance during the period of transition to a federal democratic state. <https://kscc.karennistate.com/about-kscc>

Patriarchal systems still dominate, and women struggle to find a place in politics. This political system wasn't created for women—it's a male-centric structure designed to center men in political roles.

Therefore, it's extremely difficult for us to engage with the current political environment from women's identity. Often, we are forced to adapt our strategies and exert more effort. The power dynamics often leave me feeling that I don't have a strong voice for myself.

While there are overall few women involved in politics, there are many from WLB member organizations, so we find strength in each other. We are a minority from the beginning. If we give in to differences among ourselves, we will not be able to change this male-centered arena. I see this as a significant challenge. Additionally, within our women's groups, there is a need to deepen our understanding of feminist values and principles. Those who haven't studied feminism in-depth often label feminists as extreme or radical.

But feminism is about reconstructing a political system that values women's experiences.

Historically, political systems haven't been based on women's perspectives, which is why we struggle. Traditional views of women as subordinates still prevail, making it difficult to value women's experiences in political spaces.

At KSCC, we have a fundamental principle that a minimum of 30 percent of every sector should include women. We advocate strongly for this principle. As meeting the minimum is challenging, we strive to understand the reasons behind this difficulty. Many in our political leadership don't fully grasp the importance of gender inclusion. They lack an understanding of why this fundamental principle was established, which is a major issue. Therefore, we continue to push for this understanding and advocate for women's participation in governance and administration with a rate of at least 30 percent representation. This is gradually starting to be considered and implemented.

We have also drafted a gender policy framework for Karenni State, based on women's experiences in our state. This framework outlines the challenges women face and proposes solutions to promote equality across the political system. If KSCC approves this framework, its member organizations and existing government structures in Karenni must follow its guidelines. We hope this framework will ease the difficulties women face in politics and make a meaningful impact on institutional and federal levels.

The experience and skills I received from WLB have been invaluable. WLB provided a solid foundation for my activism and future actions, helping clarify my stance, especially when working with political groups in this revolution. With WLB's member organizations present wherever I go, I never feel alone. In this revolution,

we have to connect and engage with different sectors. The most important thing is that we need to be strong.

I believe that WLB is a source of strength when it comes to standing firmly and asserting my position. The diversity of backgrounds, ages, and perspectives within WLB allows us to learn from each other's experiences. The experiences and knowledge I gained at WLB have prepared me to participate meaningfully and confidently in discussions, negotiations, and political strategy sessions. I am grateful for the grounding it has provided.



Mu Angela

Mu Angela served as a policy board member of the WLB from 2015 through 2018. She currently serves as Joint General Secretary for both the KSCC and the Kayan Women's Organization (KyWO). She also represents KSCC at the NUCC as a council member. She is the former General Secretary of Union of Karenni State Youth (UKSY).

I joined KyWO in 2011, initially serving as coordinator of the Karenni State Loikaw Learning Center – my first responsibility with WLB in Karenni State. The Learning Center opened as a platform for women to meet and collaborate. I managed the center for two years, during which I learned a great deal. WLB not only guided us in implementing activities but also invested in our capacity-building. In 2013, I joined the federalism training of trainers, which sparked my interest in politics, gender equality, and federal democracy, and I gradually realized my passion for these areas.

In 2015, I also became a policy board member of the WLB. I learned a lot in this role, especially on political issues. This allowed me to understand political situations not only in my own Karenni State but also in other states and expand my network significantly, especially in EROs. Through WLB, I had the opportunity to meet ERO leaders directly, and to learn about their perspectives and experiences. This exposure was invaluable, as it would have been difficult to connect with these leaders solely through my local organization. WLB has a strong political history and connections with EROs, as the only women's political organization recognized by ethnic resistance leaders. This experience with WLB also

introduced me to the global women's movement, showing me how women around the world advocate for gender equality and apply feminist principles in various contexts. Consequently, I became increasingly dedicated to promoting women in politics.

My experiences with WLB have also greatly benefited my mother organization. Learning from WLB, I continue to work toward advancing women's political participation and access to decision-making roles within KyWO. I currently hold a decision-making position thanks to WLB's capacity-building efforts, and my experiences working there.

Recently, I've focused more on state matters due to limited human resources within our Karenni State. Additionally, I served as General Secretary of the UKSY. In this role, my responsibilities included youth affairs and national reconciliation – UKSY's main goal. To advance national reconciliation, I worked closely with EROs, particularly within Karenni State. Applying my experience with WLB, I was able to effectively engage with ethnic forces in our state. In meetings with EROs, we should know what interests them and the strategies needed to approach them effectively. When discussing women's participation

and equality, we must also understand the issues of national equality and the building of a federal democracy, which are important to ethnic groups. Only by discussing these topics together can we then move on to talk about women's participation and gender equality. This approach increases recognition and interest from leaders.

After the 2021 military coup, various stakeholders came together to form the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC), to guide the political and revolutionary forces in our state. KyWO participated as a women's representative at KSCC proceedings. I have been serving as Joint General Secretary (2) of KSCC. Currently, KSCC has established an interim government, including legislative, judiciary, and executive branches, where KSCC's main role is to guide the executive branch according to policy.

One significant achievement has been my continued effective and meaningful participation in the state's critical roles.

This involvement was possible due to WLB's commitment to creating opportunities, rotating leadership, and promoting inclusivity, which allowed me to contribute actively to our state's most critical sectors.

An additional achievement was the establishment of six critical principles in the Karenni Interim Arrangement. One of them was a 30 percent minimum participation requirement for women across the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches, to achieve gender representation in several key positions and in all levels of government. For example, one of the three state-level judges is a woman, and women now make up two of the six members of the Interim Executive Council (IEC). We also advocated for the inclusion of at least one woman in each department's leadership, with some departments meeting the minimum target. Despite challenges, this ensures women participate in decision-making roles.

The KSCC also adopted a gender policy framework, implemented across legislative, executive, and judiciary branches, led by four women's member organizations. I played a key role in forming these four women's groups at the state level.

KSCC has three representatives at NUCC, where I represent KSCC at the state level. Initially, we did not participate due to priority given to parliamentarians from the main winning parties and EROs. In early 2023, KSCC was reformed and I decided to focus on political engagement at the union level by joining the NUCC, rather than continuing my role in KSCC's executive team. With the

agreement of other council members, I became a council representative of KSCC within NUCC, as I had a strong interest in the broader political landscape.

Despite our continued involvement and efforts, significant challenges remain. The journey to overcoming patriarchal influences and advancing women's rights and gender equality will take time. While I hold an important role, I remain under the guidance of male leadership, and we women face continued limitations in achieving parity.

Reducing militarism and dismantling the patriarchal system requires ongoing effort, and I am committed to persevering in this struggle.

Previously, I was an activist within civil society organizations, advocating independently and critiquing the

government. After the coup, my formal role in political leadership with KSCC involved guiding policy. This shift brought some confusion to my various roles. As political leaders in Karenni State, we face restrictions, and I have learned to control my activist perspective to maintain unity. This experience has deepened my understanding of the difficulties involved. Although women in Karenni State participate actively, we still lack full access to key decision-making roles. During the coup, decision-making authority leaned towards EROs, whose power and influence were bolstered by public support. Their sacrifices and leadership often placed them in top decision-making roles, limiting participation from civil society, women's organizations, and youth groups. This restriction stems not only from a lack of power but also from persistent gender biases. Overcoming these challenges remains our ongoing struggle.



Nang Kiel Zin

Nang Kiel Zin joined the Pa-O Women's Union (PWU) in 2013. She served as Co-Executive Director from 2018 through 2020, and is currently the Community Strengthening Program Coordinator. She is currently a member of the Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC).

I joined PWU in 2013. There, I attended many trainings organized by PWU and other network organizations, learning about politics, federalism, democracy, human rights, and women's rights. Over the years, I held various positions at PWU, serving as Co-Executive Director from 2018 to 2020. Currently, I am the Community Strengthening Program Coordinator.

As a PWU member, I have been involved in various WLB activities, including managing and implementing WLB subgrants to run data collection and political initiatives in our target areas. I led trainings and gathered data in conflict zones and IDP camps, educating the Pa-O community by organizing and conducting workshops on various issues. Representing PWU, I participated in WLB workshops and forums and was a backup Policy Board member from 2019-2022.

In addition to my work as a women's rights activist, I became involved in Pa-O political and national affairs. From 2014 to 2015, I was on the organizing committee for the Pa-O Youth Forum, served as a representative in the Myanmar Youth Forum in 2016, and participated in the Pa-O National Political Dialogue in 2017 as part of the peace process. I actively led discussions and participated in public consultations.

In 2020, I ran as a candidate in the General Election for Hsi Hseng Township, representing the Union Pa-O National Organization (UPNO) party. WLB provided financial support, technical assistance, and media strategies to help increase visibility and engagement for women candidates, allowing me to reach a wider audience.

As PWU, we have represented the voices of Pa-O women within existing Pa-O organizations. In politics, we have successfully integrated gender perspectives and women's viewpoints. We have introduced the Pa-O community to liberal ideas and human rights issues, and nurtured Pa-O women leaders. We were able to show Pa-O women's capabilities and influence public opinion within our very patriarchal society. At first, Pa-O youth showed little interest in politics due to the restrictive nature of the Pa-O community, so we had to work hard to engage them. We encouraged a renewed interest in politics with regular youth outreach. We have also persuaded some traditional Pa-O leaders to consider gender inclusivity, helping them become more receptive to these ideas. I now hold leadership and decision-making roles equal to men.

Our Pa-O community is small and often very restrictive. We face a lack of recognition and have few allies within the resistance movement. So, I think more support and technical assistance must be provided for Pa-O's political and national efforts.

After the military coup in 2021, it became unsafe to continue living within the country so I had to relocate urgently with significant support to a safe area. Then I got more involved in the resistance movement. I joined several groups working to end any dictatorship, including the military dictatorship, and to establish a federal democratic union with self-determination. These groups include the Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC) and the Pa-O CSOs Forum. In 2022-2023, I also served as a representative of the PNFC in the NUCC.

The Pa-O community is quite patriarchal. Despite my efforts, I sometimes feel the results and recognition are limited. Being a young woman as well as an ethnic minority, there are constraints to my participation in policy-making and political discussions. I also face challenges with self-confidence, feeling that I lack sufficient competence in military affairs and political issues.

Balancing organizational work and political activities is also difficult due to time constraints.

WLB's training, political courses, and forums have been instrumental in supporting my work. I have learned a lot from WLB's initiatives. I was able to incorporate gender perspectives and women's viewpoints in the political movements and organizations in which I am involved. Additionally, participating at the WLB policy-making level has helped me gain a wealth of experience and knowledge on politics. I have particularly benefited from WLB's focus on feminist federalism.

WLB allowed me to deepen my understanding of how to approach federalism from a feminist perspective.

My achievements would not be possible without WLB's support. Thanks to their assistance and the knowledge they provided, I am actively engaged on a political platform, continuing my work on Pa-O political and national affairs, women's issues, and federal union matters.



Mae Soe Soe Nwe

Mae Soe Soe Nwe is a member of the Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU). She was a trainee in WLB's first Women's Development Course in 2000. She has held various positions at WLB, including Joint General Secretary from 2015-2017.

At the eighth WLB Congress, I was elected as the Joint General Secretary of WLB for the 2015 to 2017 term. I also worked at the WLB Secretariat. My term as part of the WLB Secretariat came with numerous challenges as well as accomplishments. I became the Joint General Secretary during a period of significant political change under a semi-civilian government in Burma/Myanmar. During that time, peace negotiations with armed ethnic groups were also taking place, adding to the challenges of the overloaded work. The political transformation required extensive representation and activity inside Burma/Myanmar.

For us, as a group long based in the border areas, working inside the country posed some difficulties. Our historical backgrounds were different, and there were differing political perspectives, with some groups just focused on advancing democracy. WLB, as an organization fighting for a federal union alongside ethnic groups from the border, faced challenges due to these differences.

WLB also has rich experience from standing up amidst conflict and operating in conflict areas. Many women who have survived such experiences

now hold leadership roles. However, in settings within the country, academic qualifications often overshadow life experiences, challenging some WLB members. Other obstacles included the complexity of religious and political issues, the Rakhine conflict, and the term "Rohingya."

This time period also saw the peace process gaining momentum, and WLB worked actively to get involved through a political peace mission. This mission was formed at a WLB emergency meeting in February 2012, after former President Thein Sein's peace proposal. WLB immediately launched campaigns and discussions. Together with members of the Policy Board based in the border areas, the peace mission conducted consultations on the WLB position with EROs and CSOs on the border, such as Mae Hong Son, Mae Sod, and Chiang Mai. WLB also had its first meeting with the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) of Thein Sein's government in June 2013, where we discussed women's roles in the peace process, IDPs, and other support measures. At this meeting, MPC teamleader U Aung Min invited WLB to visit Burma/Myanmar on a study tour in order to assess the situation. Before our 2013-2014 term, the mission

had already conducted six visits and engaged with nine EROs. WLB also met with the MPC again as well as the NCCT.

During the 2013–2014 term, the peace process made significant progress. Our engagement took two forms: with the UNFC along the border and with UNA Plus inside Burma/Myanmar. The UNA ethnic political parties and UNA Plus primarily focused on constitutional reform, while the UNFC platform centered more on peace dialogue. As is well known, WLB member organizations have been operating in ethnic areas, so WLB has a strong connection with ethnic organizations along the border. We could therefore engage closely with ethnic political parties and EROs. WLB has already earned their trust through our longtime working relationships. Thus, WLB played a significant role during the changing political landscape in Burma/Myanmar.

Despite having trust in WLB, some EROs are hesitant to accept WLB as a “representative” in the political dialogue because we are women. However, being granted observer status at important high-level meetings is a success for WLB. For instance, gaining observer

access to the high-level meeting of EROs at the Law Khee Lar Conference was a significant milestone. Although only two official representatives were invited, through contributions to meeting documentation and logistics, the team was able to send up to nine members. Notably, at the Law Khee Lar Conference, ethnic leaders reached a general agreement on a draft provision within the NCA that calls for at least 30 percent women’s participation in political dialogues. This is the most remarkable success for WLB.

Thanks to WLB’s non-stop lobbying efforts, EROs have begun to consider issues of transitional justice. Although WLB couldn’t directly participate in every discussion, we were able to provide the necessary technical and logistical support to representatives, which can be attributed to the dedicated efforts of WLB.

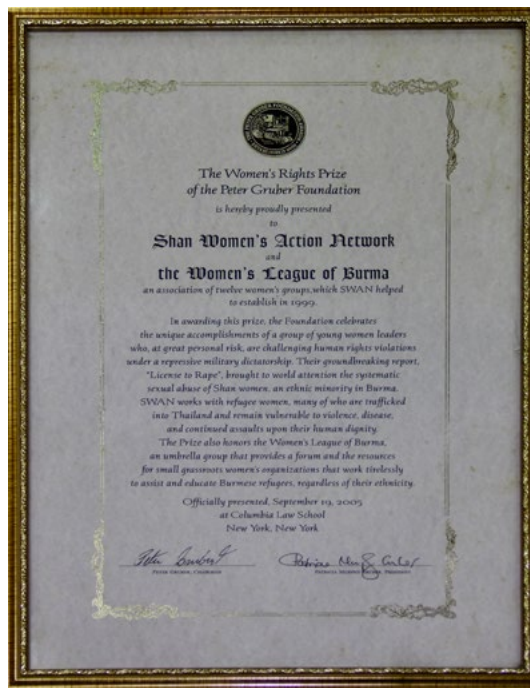
During our 2015–2017 term, we were able to carry out four peace missions and attended four high-level EAO discussions as observers. Additionally, we had the opportunity to participate in various workshops with allied organizations and the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee

(EAO-UPDJC). This enabled us to push for gender equality and inclusion in policy formation, advocating for equal representation in every sector. Between 2018 and the onset of COVID-19 in 2019, we managed to complete 16 peace missions. Most representatives on peace mission were secretaries, policy board members, and those who found time to work closely in WLB since its foundation.

I would also like to highlight my involvement in the peace process in other capacities. At the start of our term, the Union Peace Conference was about to take place. During this time, I was actively engaged in the CSO Forum as a WLB representative, where there were also representatives from women's organizations affiliated with WLB. Because of WLB's longstanding position as a cross-border resistance women's organization, one of the main challenges we faced was navigating our interactions with groups and individuals inside Burma/Myanmar who were more accustomed to hierarchical dynamics. It took significant time for us to foster mutual understanding with these groups and build trust on both sides.

Despite these challenges, I tried my best in our work. I'm grateful that WLB continuously nurtured me from the start, transforming my role from a learner to a leader, just as it has for other member organizations of WLB. WLB has invested in us from our youth, and now many have returned as leaders in their respective regions. These individuals are the fruits of WLB's long-standing investment and cultivation. I am grateful to both my mother organization and to WLB, my second family. To this day, WLB remains close to my heart —it is like a mother. I continue to feel deep gratitude towards my mother organization and WLB, alongside my birth family.

AWARDS



2005
*Peter Gruber Foundation's
Women's Rights Prize*



2008
*Jeane J. Kirkpatric Award
from International Republican
Institute (IRI)*



2008
*Madeleine K. Albright Award
from National Democratic
Institute (NDI)*

2019

*Human Rights Tulip
Myanmar 2019 Award*



**The Janet Benshoof
Global Justice Award**



**The Women's League of
Burma**

Over a 15 year partnership, GJC has worked with WLB to push for a more equal and just Burma for women.

2020

*Janet Benshoof Global
Justice Award*

**Presenting the winner for the
Sir Ronald Wilson Award 2021**

The Women's League of Burma



2021

*Sir Ronald Wilson Award
from Australian Council for
International Development
(ACFID)*



2021

*Judith Lee Stronach Award
from the center for justice
and accountability*

2022

*Women, Peace and
Security Award*

A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, stands on the right side of the frame, facing a group of people seated on the floor. The room has a wooden ceiling and walls. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, reddish-brown color cast. The woman appears to be addressing the group, possibly during a meeting or presentation. The people are mostly men, some looking towards the speaker, others looking down at papers or devices. The overall atmosphere is one of a formal or semi-formal gathering.

ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL: LOCAL TO GLOBAL

Through our “local to global” strategy, WLB works to raise global awareness of mass displacement and targeted violence experienced by women of Burma and ethnic minorities under the military regime. By amplifying Burmese women’s experiences on the world stage, WLB calls on the international community’s commitments to protect the human rights of the most vulnerable, and to hold the military junta accountable for its crimes against the people of Burma/Myanmar. WLB activists conduct extensive documentation of human rights violations within the country – documentation which informs WLB’s submissions and presentations in international forums. WLB brings local voices to the global stage, including the experiences of survivors of sexual violence and women in conflict zones.

We have spoken out in forums including the UN Security Council, Human Rights Council, and the Commission on the Status of Women. WLB has made submissions to the CEDAW Committee and for Burma/Myanmar’s Universal Periodic Review, and participated in organizing the International Tribunal on Crimes Against the Women of Burma together with the Nobel Women’s Initiative at the 2010 CSW / Beijing Plus 15 Conference.



Moon Nay Li

Moon Nay Li has worked closely with WLB since 2003, and is a member of the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT). She has held various positions on WLB's Policy Board and Advisory Board. She currently serves as the WLB Joint General Secretary (1).

Since 2003, I have worked closely with WLB through my mother organization, KWAT, contributing primarily to documentation efforts, international advocacy, and political representation. I also represent WLB in political dialogues with EROs. WLB's significant work involves uplifting voices from local to international levels, with documentation being a key task. In 2004, we organized our documentation efforts to be used as an international advocacy tool, paving the way for youth leaders at the 2005 CSW / Beijing Plus 10 conference to engage robustly in advocacy.

Between 2003–2004, I was trained extensively in human rights documentation, data collection, and lobbying and advocacy for impactful results. The information we collected led to the creation of a lobbying document for the 2005 CSW / Beijing Plus 10 event, where a team of over ten young women advocates and senior leaders went to advocate and lobby internationally for the first time. This was the biggest international delegation to date on issues in Burma/Myanmar. This advocacy highlighted the violence against women in conflict areas, especially the military's use of sexual violence as a weapon.

We brought local voices to the global stage, including the experiences of survivors of sexual violence and women in conflict zones.

In order to raise awareness, we gathered documentation, conducted interviews, and provided necessary support, such as safe houses along border areas like Mae Sot and in other countries where WLB's member organizations were based. Through these efforts, we gathered grassroots voices, organized forums, and conducted survivor exchanges. We regularly organized the "Violence Against Women Exchange" and transformed these insights into tools for advocacy. We prepared reports, briefing papers, policy recommendations, and documentary films for international advocacy. At that time, the situation of Burma/Myanmar was little known globally.

Following the 1990 election, international awareness of Burma/Myanmar centered mostly around Aung San Suu Kyi. WLB broadened this narrative, advocating for greater awareness of Burma/Myanmar's ethnic communities, widespread human rights abuses, gender-based violence, political turmoil and ongoing conflicts in Burma/Myanmar. We emphasized the situation of women's human rights and inequality faced by ethnic nationalities. Our advocacy targeted the United Nations (UN) system, including the Human Rights Council (known as the Human Rights Commission at that time), Security Council, General Assembly, and the Commission on the Status of Women. WLB engaged in annual advocacy trips to lobby at these international events, and prepared a shadow report to the CEDAW Committee during Burma/Myanmar's

CEDAW review, ensuring local voices were heard on the international stage.

WLB was a pioneer in the 2000s for international advocacy, uniting various ethnic women's organizations to expose the military's use of sexual violence. We used UNSCR 1325 on women, peace, and security as an advocacy tool, translating it into ethnic languages and conducting workshops to promote the principles locally and globally. Since 2005, we have urged EROs to adhere to these principles, advocating for the inclusion of women in peace processes.

In our quest for justice, we highlighted gender-based violence, human rights violations, and international crimes to hold Burmese military leaders accountable. From 2006, we collaborated with other organizations to call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) for a Commission of Inquiry. During this advocacy, particularly with the ICC, we faced intense surveillance from the military junta, which targeted WLB's activities. Our events were often raided, and our movements were closely monitored. Military informants were everywhere, even at UN Security Council meetings. Our advocacy required evasion from constant surveillance, with military informants often intercepting our communications. Nonetheless, we managed to carry out our advocacy amid the challenges and hostility.

More recently, we've intensified our focus on transitional justice and international accountability, amplifying the voices

of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and presenting their testimonies on the global stage. We highlight their stories with the aim of achieving justice for survivors and holding military junta leaders accountable for their crimes, while also strengthening international accountability mechanisms.

Practically, we faced major challenges, one of the biggest being security for everyone involved. Bringing survivors to New York to testify was also difficult due to significant obstacles in obtaining travel documents and visas, which meant that most could not attend the event. Despite these challenges, we achieved significant milestones, including organizing the International Tribunal on Crimes Against the Women of Burma together with the Nobel Women's Initiative at the 2010 CSW / Beijing Plus 15 Conference.

Regionally, WLB has participated in the Asian People's Forum to further our advocacy efforts while collaborating with women's organizations across Southeast Asia to strengthen our initiatives, though security issues remain a challenge due to ASEAN's ties with the Burmese military junta.

Domestically, our network remains strong, supported by robust member organizations that enable us to sustain our activities and thrive even after the military coup in 2021. Thanks to this united strength, WLB continues its vital work.



Nang Yain

Nang Yain has been involved with WLB since its formation, and is a founding member of the Burmese Women's Union (BWU). She served as General Secretary during WLB's first Congress, and was later elected to the position for two more terms from 2005-2008. She has since served on the Presidium Board and Advisory Board.

Shortly after I was elected as General Secretary in WLB's first Congress in 2001, WLB initiated its first significant local-to-global advocacy initiative. As part of this advocacy campaign, WLB participated in the WCAR process (World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances), spearheaded by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), a regional women's organization. At the WCAR process, we built on WLB's participation in the Asia Pacific NGO Networks meeting for WCAR the previous April.

There were two major tasks in this process: one was the WLB Signature Campaign and the WLB delegation to WCAR. The Signature Campaign aimed to include "Country-Specific Situation and Recommendations on Burma" in the WCAR's Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. From June to August, we conducted the Signature Campaign in collaboration with local groups and individuals in refugee camps, IDP areas, and migrant communities along Burma/Myanmar's borders with Thailand and India. We collected over 50,000 signatures.

Six of us, including me, made up the WLB delegation at WCAR. One representative was chosen to attend the Youth Summit held prior to the NGO Forum, all six members participated at the NGO

forum, and two stayed on to attend the Government Forum.

Throughout the four days of the NGO Forum, we did networking and awareness raising at our exhibition booth, showed videos, distributed publications prepared by WLB and member organizations, and shared information on the Burma/Myanmar situation. We also sold handicrafts made by refugee women living in the camps along the Thai-Burma border. Also, we organized WLB workshops and spoke at various workshops held by other organizations in our networks.

I also remember the main challenge attending the conference was security, because of the presence of the Burmese junta intelligence. It was dangerous for foreigners in Durban then. Local transportation from the hotel to the conference venue was provided, and we were advised to stay in groups and be strictly careful about personal security. So we stayed in our hotel after the activities at the Forum. The hotel was located by the beach but we dared not visit there for personal security reasons. A benefit, however, was that all representatives from different member organizations had quality time to get to know each other better. For me, it was quite a rewarding experience.

Another WLB local-to-global advocacy initiative I got involved in was the 2008

CEDAW shadow reporting process, which took place during the fourth Congress term, while I was serving as General Secretary for the third time. We formulated our work plan after attending a CEDAW workshop organized by International Women's Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific (IWRAP-AP). We started a series of capacity-building workshops for WLB member organizations on the CEDAW process. We formed a CEDAW working team (core group) at the Secretariat to coordinate and communicate with participating women's groups and other civil society groups along Burma/Myanmar's borders. We also set up a working system by having each participating group assign one person as a focal point for communications between their mother organization and the CEDAW working team.

Groups along Burma/Myanmar's borders all sent in their data, collected through different methods, including interviews and discussion sessions. Members of the working team also completed literature research and translated data from ethnic languages to English.

The working team, of which I was a member, held a number of consultation meetings among civil society groups/networks of Burma/Myanmar with the support of member organizations along the border areas.

After a year-long effort, we were able to submit the shadow report "In The Shadow of the Junta" to the CEDAW Committee. We also sent a lobbying team of nine women, mainly youth advocates, who were focal points and data collectors to attend the CEDAW Review Session in Geneva.

The advocacy trip got a lot of media attention when the report was reviewed, and we were happy to hear that the representatives of the military regime were too nervous to answer questions raised by the CEDAW Committee and gave irrelevant answers and excuses.

While our team was lobbying the CEDAW Committee, we had a book-launch event in Chiang Mai with a press conference publicising "In the Shadow of the Junta."

Personally, I'm very proud of myself and WLB as a whole for these inclusive processes, not only empowering us but also the communities we are working for and with.

I can still visualize what I got involved in and how we have done it. The memory lives on, and I would like to pass it on to our next generation of WLB.



Chichin

Chichin served on the WLB Presidium Board from 2003 through 2006. She is a founding member of the Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO) and currently serves on its board.

Our organization, KWHRO, was established on January 1, 2000, on the Burma-India border by a group of Kuki women who had fled Burma following the 1988 Students' Uprising. We founded KWHRO in response to the injustices and inequalities women faced, to promote gender equality, and to improve the living standards of Kuki women and women across Burma.

I'm one of the founding members, and in those early days, we were known as the Kuki Women's Group. We started independently, focusing on equality and advocating for women's participation in every area of life.

But our journey started even earlier. Back in 1996, we received guidance from Women's Rights and Welfare Association of Burma, now known as Women for Justice. They shared their experiences and visions, showing us what women's activism could achieve. They also supported vocational training such as sewing courses, which gave women in our community a way to earn a sustainable livelihood. From there, we began reaching out to households, encouraging women to discuss issues like domestic violence. These conversations made it clear that we needed a support system, and that's what inspired us to officially establish KWHRO.

In 2003, we joined WLB. This distinguished us from any other women's groups in our community.

WLB gave us access to training in women's rights, gender equality, and human rights documentation. These trainings helped us grow and strengthen our ability to advocate for women's empowerment.

We also received sub-grants from WLB for programs like the Women's Political Empowerment and Internship Program, followed by support for activities to combat violence against women.

We were able to organize vocational programs and connect our members with training opportunities through the WLB network. This has helped them improve their skills, gain knowledge about laws related to women, and develop expertise in organizational development.

KWHRO has always been a democratically structured organization, and that hasn't changed. Our mission has stayed clear: promoting women's rights, preserving Kuki culture, and addressing social inequalities. Over the years, we've become a recognized women's political organization within the

Kuki community and the areas we serve. We've worked hard to ensure women have a say in decision-making, aiming for at least 30 percent representation. Today, our work is expanding in districts like Tamu, Homalin, Leshi, and Tonzang, addressing women's rights, gender equality, and broader human rights issues. We continue to stand for the Kuki people and other communities. Our advocacy for 30 percent representation of women in decision-making structures is starting to gain traction in the community.

One of our significant achievements was a signature campaign to reform customary laws, pushing for fairness and equal rights. Refugee women from Burma/Myanmar who had faced violence and discrimination saw our efforts and were inspired to engage with our work.

With the knowledge and skills received from WLB, we have been able to address some key issues faced by our community.

In 2007, we fought against the Tamanthi Dam Project on the Chindwin River. This project displaced Kuki and Shan Ni villages and threatened many more. We worked with local communities, documented the project's harmful impact, and raised the issue in the Indian

Parliament. Because of our efforts, the project was temporarily suspended.

We also used our documentation of gender-based discrimination in Kuki traditions to push for reforms within our Kuki community.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic and military coup, we were able to engage with legislators to address concerns like gold mining near the Chindwin River, which has affected local farmers and communities. We even met with the Sagaing Chief Minister to ensure these issues were heard.

Through WLB, we raised the human rights situation of Kuki women, girls, and the community at the international level, including the CEDAW Committee review session at the UN, and at international women's forums like AWID⁶.

KWHRO has become more than just an organization—it's a voice for women and marginalized groups. We're proud to foster a culture of equality and advocacy, not just in the Kuki community but beyond. It wouldn't have happened without the support and encouragement of WLB.

⁶ Association for Women's Rights in Development: www.awid.org/about-awid-international-forum

A group of women, likely members of the Women's League of Burma (WLB), are shown in a line, holding flags. They are wearing traditional Burmese clothing, including conical hats and face masks. The scene is outdoors, with trees and a utility pole visible in the background. The image has a purple tint.

MOVEMENT BUILDING

In order to transform patriarchy, WLB recognizes that women must unite in a collaborative movement that is both diverse and inclusive. To this end, WLB was the first organization to successfully unite women's groups from across various regions and programmatic focus areas. WLB invests in its members, holding training and capacity-building sessions to equip women with the skills and confidence to enter traditionally male-dominated political spaces, and to conduct advocacy that highlights women's experiences and women's narratives, while advocating for gender-inclusive peace processes at the national level. Through our ever-expanding network, WLB builds a sustainable, nurturing, and empowering space for women to grow as activists and leaders.



Hseng NOUNG

Hseng NOUNG has been with WLB since its founding, and has served WLB in various capacities including General Secretary from 2003-2004, Presidium Board, and Advisory Board. She is a founder of the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN).

The idea of building a strong movement for the women of Burma was instilled in me when I participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995. My participation was supported by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)⁷. I still feel very grateful to IWDA for supporting my trip to Beijing. In Beijing, I was thrilled to see women from around the world and to learn about them and their organizations. I admired them so much that I promised myself someday I would be part of this women's movement, and I would try to find a way to build a women's movement for Burma/Myanmar. In Beijing, I collected numerous flyers and brochures from various women's organizations to use as references in establishing a Shan women's organization. I still have those materials. In Beijing, together with a few women activists and various support groups, we worked together to raise awareness about Burma/Myanmar and called for the release of all political prisoners. One of the most embarrassing aspects for the then-Burmese regime was that they sent an official delegation to the conference headed by a male army general. Nonetheless, I was glad to be

there in Beijing, and I returned home inspired with a grand vision.

Due to several circumstances, including living outside the country with limitations and restrictions, time went by, and I couldn't follow up on my vision. Meanwhile, someone from IWDA asked me if I would establish a Shan women's organization. I knew that it would be difficult while living in Bangkok, but I would do so when I moved to Chiang Mai at the end of 1998. Then, the First Forum of Women from Burma took place in November 1998. I was invited by Pippa Curwen, the Director of Burma Relief Centre (BRC), the main organizer, to attend the forum. I attended to meet with women from different parts of Burma/Myanmar. At the forum, it was principally agreed that the organizations of women from throughout Burma/Myanmar would form an umbrella organization.

After the Forum of Women from Burma in November 1998, several important meetings and informal discussions were organized in preparation for the Second Forum of Women's Organizations from Burma, which took place in

7 IWDA is now one of the main partners for several women's organizations of Burman/Myanmar, including WLB, SWAN and TWO

December 1999⁸. SWAN realized that some organizations were concerned that they may not be able to express themselves fully and achieve their desired outcomes at the upcoming Second Forum. Another concern was that meetings would become too emotional, similar to those experienced at the First Forum of Women from Burma. A few leaders from ethnic-based women's organizations recognized the importance of addressing these issues and decided to hold a small meeting to discuss their concerns and goals before the preparation meeting organized by the Burmese Women's Union (BWU) in September 1999. Therefore, in August 1999, SWAN organized a two-day meeting in Chiang Mai, funded by BRC, where we discussed these areas of concern. We also discussed how to prepare for the Second Forum of Women's Organizations. Representatives from the KWAT, KNWO, KWO, TWU, LWO, and SWAN attended the meeting.

Then, in September 1999, Naw Zipporah Sein from KWO, Nang Lao Liang Won (better known as Tay Tay), myself from SWAN, and a male representative from the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) traveled together on

an advocacy trip organized by Burma Centrum Nederland (BCN) to Europe. This trip provided us the space and opportunity to discuss informally how the emerging women's alliance could be organized and function effectively. Throughout our trip, we were often asked why there were so few women's voices and representatives from the Burmese opposition movement. Moreover, we shared our plans for organizing a women's alliance in December 1999. We also expressed our confidence that the would-be alliance would amplify women's voices and encourage the greater participation of women in politics. During the advocacy trip, we met with several funding organizations, one of which supported the Second Forum in December 1999.

Then, I was named one of the seven organizing committee members, established during the preparatory meeting organized by BWU for the Second Forum in December 1999. As an organizing committee member, I was able to help with many things, including securing funds for the Second Forum from different donors and coordinating with different organizations to ensure the event would be well organized.

8 The outcome of this forum was women's organizations from Burma established the Women's League of Burma (WLB), the first historic milestone of the women's movement of Burma/Myanmar.

SWAN invited Marie Smith, the project officer for Trocaire based in Ireland, to visit us. At that time, she was visiting Chiang Mai. We asked Marie if Trocaire could provide funding for the forum. Trocaire agreed, and the funding was channeled through the National Reconciliation Program (NRP) in Chiang Mai.

Following these fundraising and logistical efforts, the Second Forum was convened, during which the heritoric WLB was founded – an umbrella women’s organization comprising women’s groups from diverse political and ethnic backgrounds. I still vividly recall some significant moments from the forum. SWAN served as a meeting place and coordination center before and after the Second Forum, continuing this role until WLB could establish its own office in 2001.

More than ten years later, in July 2010, I received an email from a woman working in Yangon, whom we had met a few years earlier. She asked to meet me while she was in Thailand. When we met in Chiang Mai later that month, she shared her idea of organizing a women’s workshop to connect women from her network inside the country with our WLB network. It was an excellent idea. I consulted with my WLB colleagues, first with Tay Tay,

and then with Mi Sue Pwint. After that, we discussed at the WLB Secretariat for WLB members based in Thailand to participate in the workshop. In late October 2010, seven WLB members secretly met with women activists from Burma/Myanmar in Bangkok, Thailand.

We were incredibly anxious before the meeting. I still remember the moment we first met. The meeting was thrilling, emotional, and highly productive.

I will never forget this gathering, as it marked another heritoric moment for WLB—connecting with women who shared our vision for women and Burma/Myanmar, despite the geographical distance.

Following that, two more “Bridging Women Workshops” were organized, giving other WLB sisters a chance to meet with sisters working inside the country and to discuss our issues, concerns, and possible work plans. These meetings laid the foundation for WLB’s expansion of our movement-building efforts inside Burma/Myanmar. A big thanks to the initiative’s organizer and supporter!



Julia Marip

Julia Marip served as Joint General Secretary (2) in WLB's 7th Congress and as General Secretary in WLB's 8th Congress. She is a member of the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT).

Even before I became involved with WLB in 2011, WLB initiated movement-building among women's organizations across borders. WLB opened women's centers in various areas of Burma/Myanmar where member organizations or former trainees of the WLB Inland Project were located. In October 2012, WLB was invited to participate in the first Women's Forum organized by Women's Organizations Network of Myanmar (WON), in which two WLB leaders joined the working team of the forum, marking the first time WLB publicly participated inside Burma/Myanmar.

Shortly after I became Joint General Secretary (2) in June 2013, I moved to Burma/Myanmar to physically expand WLB's operation there. As part of my responsibilities, I supervised six women's centers in Yangon, Mawlamyine, Sittwe, Loikaw, Lashio, and Dawei. We held monthly women's exchanges to foster alliances and movement-building at the grassroots level.

At the national level, we organized our first public event together with WON: the first Women's Forum in September 2013, held in the heart of Yangon. This event was a huge success, with women parliamentarians, peace activists, and ethnic leaders in attendance. It was the first forum where we could celebrate the 2013 International Day of Peace by marching across Yangon with banners, demonstrating women's unity and sparking a new wave of women's forums.

We were also able to launch a campaign to gather signatures calling for the release of activist Naw Ohn Hla, who was then in prison along with other women's human rights defenders, and for an end to judicial harassment against women activists across Burma/Myanmar.

Following this success, we jointly organized the second forum in 2014 with WON, with over 400 attendees and excellent media coverage. Starting in 2015, we organized an annual Women's Forum for Peace around the International Day of Peace (21 September). I believe these forums unified women's voices and supported equality and reform in Burma/Myanmar. Celebrating International Peace Day, these forums also fostered trust and collaboration for peace and development. Reflecting on my experiences, I feel that the first forum we organized in 2013 was especially successful during my time at WLB—a crucial first step in our movement-building efforts.

To expand our alliance and movement-building efforts, we began organizing national-level Women's Exchanges during my term as WLB Secretary, in conjunction with the anniversary of WLB's founding day from 2016 onward. The first Women's Exchange, titled "Raising Women's Voices from Conflict-Affected Areas," aimed to amplify grassroots women's voices. At this exchange, women from different areas affected by armed conflict

shared testimonies about their struggles and suffering due to the Thein Sein Government's ongoing military offensives and human rights violations, including sexual violence, as well as the role of women in conflict and the challenges of women's participation in the peace process, where ethnic women's voices were often unheard. It was a great success, well-attended by national women's networks, women parliament members, and the media.

Building on this achievement, WLB organized national-level women's exchanges annually in Burma/ Myanmar until the COVID-19 pandemic. Personally, I feel that these women's forums and exchanges allowed us to go beyond development work and address issues arising from the ongoing political reform process.

We consistently criticized, spoke out, applied pressure, and mobilized against the government's unjust actions in politics, economics, peace-building, and other areas, as well as against human and women's rights violations, and justice violations.

WLB actively collaborates with its members and other women's groups and networks inside Burma/Myanmar to build strong alliances.

Through these alliances, we work with women in various civil society groups, ethnic political parties, democratic forces, and armed groups, establishing solid relationships and partnerships to strengthen the feminist movement.

A significant challenge in organizing these events was the need for identification cards or registration for our WLB members. We informed U Aung Min at the MPC and other officials, allowing us to travel to Yangon and stay in hotels. Yet, we still faced obstacles and had to move hotels each night due to security concerns. Later, we also visited the MPC. While we gained some recognition, our growing reputation increased the security risks.

Nonetheless, I feel delighted and proud that WLB was able to convene these public forums aiming to build a national-level movement. These events were successfully organized with good media coverage in Yangon, the former capital of Burma/Myanmar, during my two terms serving as WLB secretary.



Nang Lao Liang Won

Nang Lao Liang Won, better known as Tay Tay, has served in various positions since WLB's founding, including as a member of the WLB Advisory Board. She is a founder of the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN).

I have been involved with the WLB-initiated local-to-global advocacy process since 2001 after the First Congress. This was the WCAR process and was WLB's first time participating.

With my experience working with the regional feminist organization APWLD, which led the Asia Pacific NGOs Networks for WCAR, I acted as the liaison between WLB and APWLD for technical and logistical support related to the WCAR advocacy trip to Durban, South Africa, and during the Conference. My role involved coordinating WLB's self-organised workshops and WLB's speeches, presentations etc., managing travel logistics for international travel, and fundraising for our delegation to Durban. Thanks to the support of the UN NGO-Liaison Office, APWLD, and the Global Fund for Women, we secured the necessary funding to conduct this advocacy trip. Initially, eight WLB members were selected to attend WCAR, though only six, including myself, ultimately made the trip due to visa issues.

Significant moments for me were when my WLB refugee sister spoke at the official WCAR plenary, and when

we submitted all collected signatures to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mary Robinson. As a newly established, exiled umbrella women's organization, we learned many technical and logistical lessons and gained valuable experience bridging UN-level and grassroots-level advocacy. These lessons became the foundation for WLB's future international advocacy.

Building on our WCAR experience, WLB embarked on another significant advocacy effort, the Beijing Plus Ten Process, as part of our "State Violence Against Women in Burma" campaign, based on the Licence to Rape report by SWAN and the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF). WLB began the Beijing Plus Ten Process in August 2003, with me as the team leader and liaison.

Starting in August 2003, we held a series of workshops and consultation meetings. With technical assistance from the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) at the University of New South Wales, we conducted Human Rights Documentation and Lobby Training on the Beijing Plus Ten Process. CRR also supported the drafting of our report, *System of Impunity*⁹, by compiling data collected by the participants after the

9 It was unfortunate that WLB decided to discontinue publicizing the report and completely delete

training. With CRR's support, WLB also published the purple booklet, compiling stories shared by WLB Women's Against Violence Program team members during the training. System of Impunity, which exposed nationwide sexual violence by the Burmese military regime's forces, was launched at the UNESCAP (The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on Beijing Plus Ten in Bangkok. The purple booklet was used as a lobbying tool at Beijing+10 in New York.

Working closely with Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW) and APWLD, CRR facilitated connections between WLB documenters (also WLB Violence Against Women Team members). These connections enabled WLB documenters to attend the Asia-Pacific NGOs Forum on Beijing Plus 10 in mid-2004, UNESCAP on Beijing Plus 10 in September 2004, and Beijing Plus 10 (the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women) in New York. I believe this process instilled feminist perspectives among WLB's then-young advocates, who gained experience working with and engaging prominent regional and global feminist leaders.

With our increasing experience, we confidently engaged in the 2008 CEDAW review process of Burma/Myanmar, guided by training workshops from IWRAW-AP. As in previous advocacy efforts, we prepared to lobby the CEDAW Committee through a concrete work plan at WLB.

In September 2008, we submitted the shadow report *In The Shadow of the Junta* to the CEDAW Committee. Our lobbying team of nine women, mainly young advocates, was able to attend the CEDAW Review Session and effectively engage with the CEDAW Committee. This community-oriented, empowering process resulted in the Committee's Concluding Observations on Burma/Myanmar, which primarily reflected issues raised by women.

WLB's latest local-to-global advocacy was the 2016 CEDAW review process, where we collaborated with women's networks and groups based inside Burma/Myanmar through the Women's Organizations Network (WON). From 2014 onward, we worked closely with WON to build its members' capacity for CEDAW reporting. WLB held a number of consultation meetings with CAM, WON, and CSOs on the border before submitting the report¹⁰ to the

it from the WLB website due to the objection of WLB's then-member, Rakhaing Women's Union (RWU), for the use of "Rohingya" in the report.

¹⁰ The development of the report was technically assisted by the Global Justice Center (GJC).

CEDAW Committee in early June 2016. Before the lobbying trip to the 64th CEDAW Review Session in Geneva, WLB organized a two-day Preparation Workshop for CEDAW advocacy among representatives. This resulted in a coordinated lobbying team, the CEDAW Alliance, with an agreed set of prioritized issues.

In July, the CEDAW NGO Team Burma/Myanmar, comprised of 26 members with eight WLB delegates, including me, attended the Review Session and effectively lobbied as the CEDAW Alliance. This led to strong Concluding Observations by the CEDAW Committee. The 2016 CEDAW process provided a platform for cross-border women's networks to strengthen Burma's women's movement.


The local-to-global advocacy strategy is part of strengthening WLB's feminist movement-building efforts. Through these processes, WLB has empowered individual women, member organizations, and their communities. We feel we have achieved considerable success in addressing Burma/Myanmar's issues using international mechanisms, gaining recognition as both women of Burma/Myanmar and a growing feminist movement.

This success would not have been possible without the support of regional and global women's networks, especially APWLD, our partners/supporters, and communities across borders.

ENVISIONING WLB IN THE NEXT 25 YEARS

We will continue and expand our work as a feminist, broad-based, inclusive representative of all women at all levels by building a strong feminist movement that brings together a diverse range of women's organizations in a strong coalition, broadening its advocacy to spread our message across all levels to foster change; supporting and advocating on behalf of all women's human rights defenders; encouraging the exercise of self-determination starting at the local level; consulting with women to ensure that our work represents the interest and needs of all women across the country; and devoting the necessary resources to create a healthy and strong women's political organization.

We will continue and expand our work to achieve an inclusive, feminist federal democracy that includes women and ensures respect for fundamental human rights by continuing to engage actively and centering fundamental human rights in Burma's political peace processes with more significant influence and strength, fostering, training, and supporting the development of women political leaders who can assume political roles and truly advocate for women's needs; ensuring women's leadership in various roles, particularly in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, through a bottom-up federal system approach; advocating for meaningful participation of women in all processes of political change and reform at all decision-making levels, with influence equal to that of male counterparts; and taking on leadership roles and representing women widely in various sectors.



We will continue and expand our work to eliminate impunity and secure justice and accountability for gender-based violence, especially conflict-related sexual violence, by centering human rights guaranteed by international law in its advocacy for justice for and prevention of GBV and CRSV, advocating at all levels, including at the UN and other international fora, for meaningful action to eliminate impunity for CRSV and other human rights violations; supporting local and national mechanisms that provide trauma-informed, survivor-centered justice for GBV and CRSV survivors and other affected civilians and communities; and engaging with and advocating for the rights of survivors and other affected civilians and communities in all ongoing accountability efforts, including at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and in national courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

We will continue and expand our work to promote our feminist vision of a more gender equal and peaceful society by striving to end patriarchal systems; supporting implementation of international human rights norms regarding gender equality; changing social norms at the grassroots level to realize greater gender equality; and empowering women to achieve genuine equality and peace to put an end to patriarchal dominance.

ANNEXES

WLB Programs at a Glance [2009 - 2024]



Peace and Justice (formerly known as Peace and Reconciliation Program)

+9,400

women, men, and individuals of other genders supported and empowered through trainings, workshops, seminars, political forums, and advocacy



Women Against Violence (ran under Peace and Justice Program since 2023)

+533

trainings, workshop & public events

including International Women's Day, End of Torture Day, 16 days of activism, and more.



Leadership for Change (formerly known as Political Empowerment Program)

+4,300

women, men, and other genders empowered through trainings, workshops, and political forums

+30,000

individuals of all genders participated in the programs and received assistance.

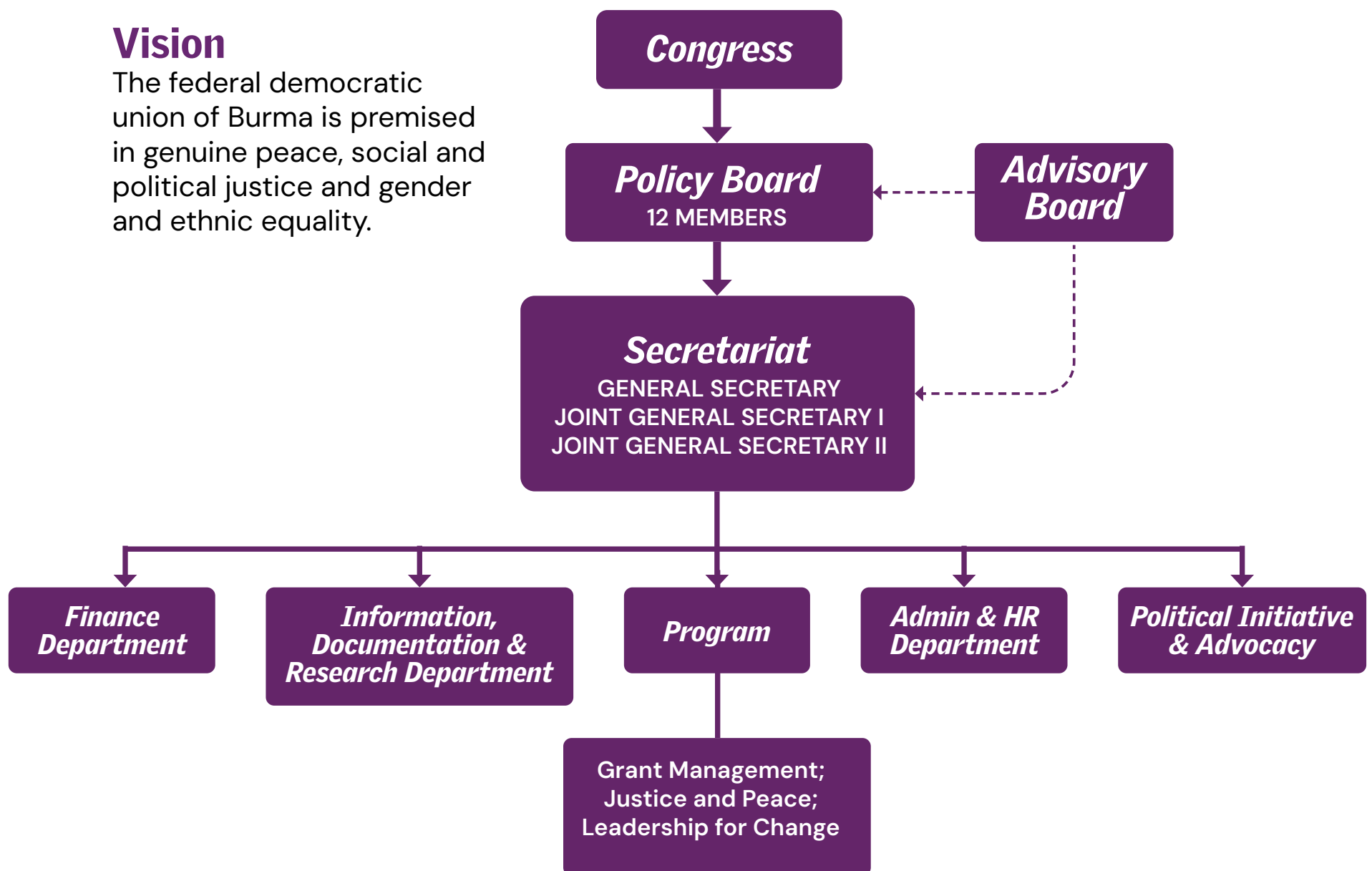
WLB's Governance

Mission

WLB mission is to advance the status of women toward a peaceful, just and federal democratic union of Burma.

Vision

The federal democratic union of Burma is premised in genuine peace, social and political justice and gender and ethnic equality.



Member Organizations' Governance



BURMESE WOMEN'S UNION (BWU)

FOUNDING DAY	7 JANUARY 1995
# OF MEMBERS	300+

VISION There must be a society that values gender equality, justice, peace, and harmonized human existence.

MISSION We, the women of Myanmar, have zero tolerance and stand united in our unwavering commitment to reject all forms of discrimination based on gender, race, and religion. We recognize the strength of diversity which is a driving force in our collective struggle to end all forms of dictatorship. Our efforts are dedicated to ensuring the emergence of a federal democracy that guarantees ethnic and gender equality through advocacy, empowerment, research, and capacity building.

STRUCTURE





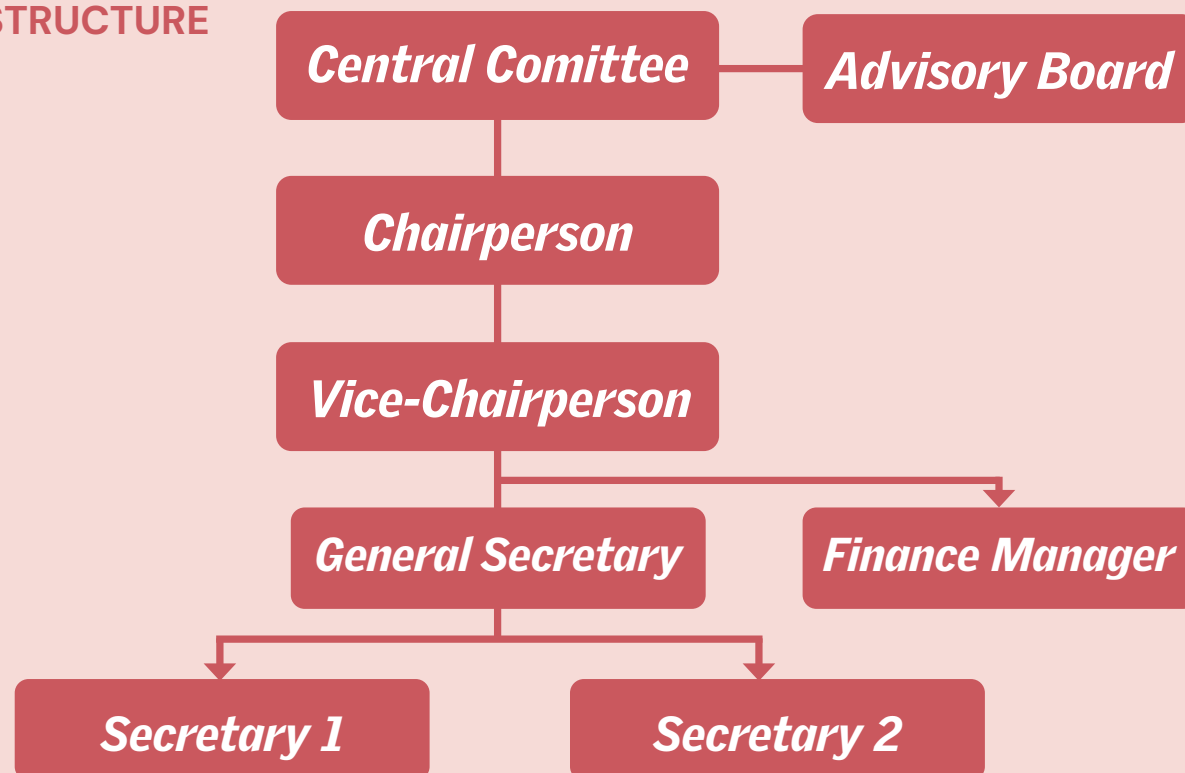
KARENNI NATIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION (KNWO)

FOUNDING DAY	10 MARCH 1993
# OF MEMBERS	NEARLY 2,000

VISION Karenni Women and girls are able to make their own choices in their lives enjoy full equal right in social, economic and political life and live free from violence; to build the capacity of women to be decision makers and leaders in their families and communities, to promote and protect Karenni women's rights locally and globally and to provide necessary services and support to women and children to ensure their well-being.

MISSION To ensure the KNWO is an international recognized women's organization and advocate for the equal rights, empowerment, protection, livelihood and peaceful society for women and girls who are living the refugee camps along the Thai- Burma border and in the Karenni state.

STRUCTURE





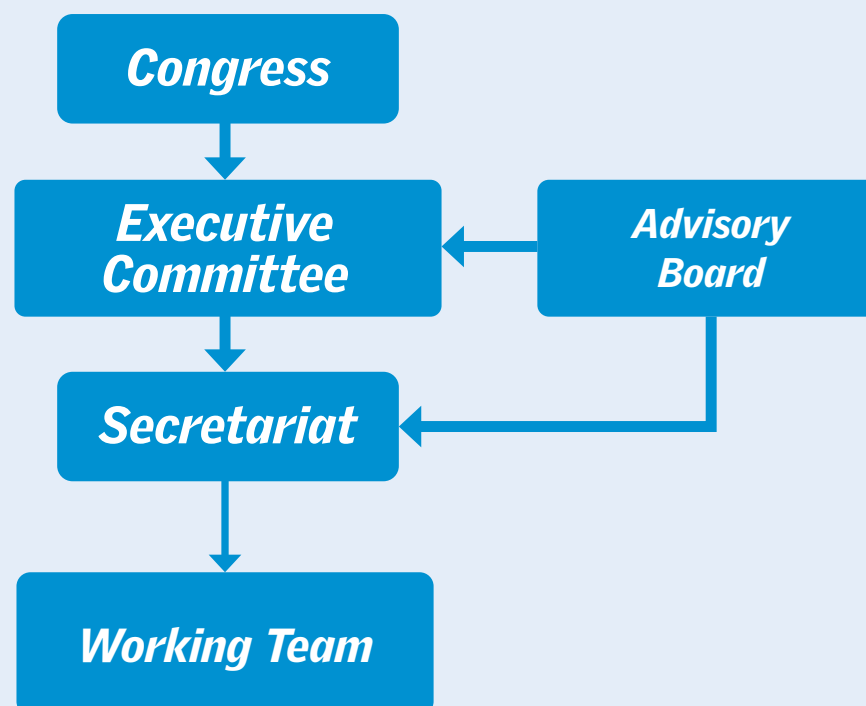
KACHIN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION THAILAND (KWAT)

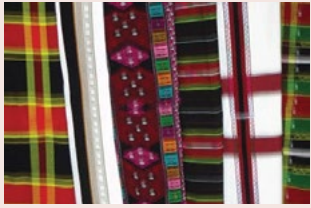
FOUNDING DAY	9 SEPTEMBER 1999
# OF MEMBERS	100+

VISION The Kachin Women's Association Thailand-KWAT envisions a peaceful and developed society which is free of discrimination and oppression.

MISSION The Kachin Women's Association Thailand-KWAT is a non-profit organization which works to eliminate discrimination and violence against women, enhance the living standards of women and enable them to participate in decision-making processes at all levels, and strengthen the quest for social justice, peace and development in the Kachin region.

STRUCTURE



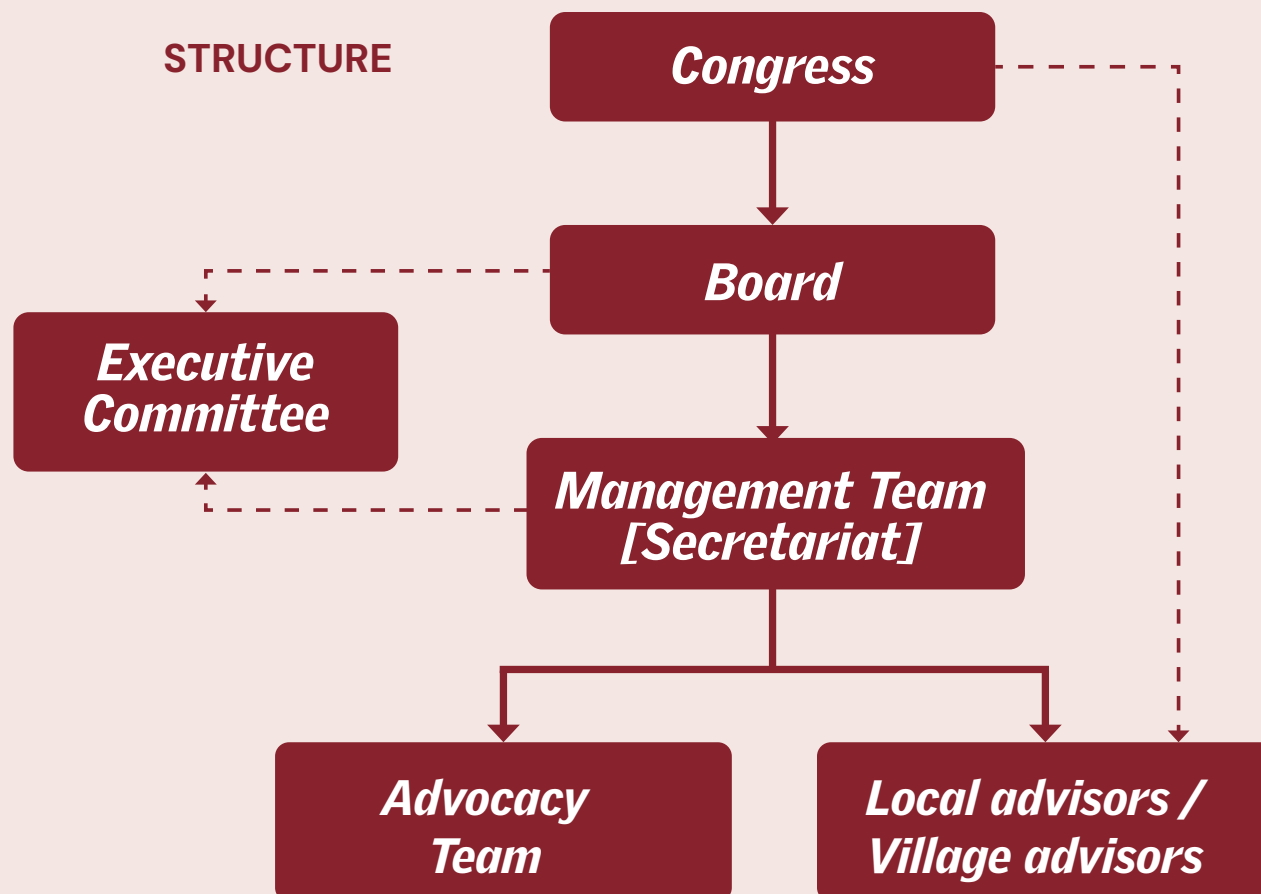


KUKI WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION (KWHRO)

FOUNDING DAY 1 JANUARY 2000

OF MEMBERS ALL KUKI WOMEN

- AIMS & OBJECTIVES:**
- To bring to the world's attention the rampant violation of the basic human rights of the Kukis of Burma by the military junta and to seek an end to it.
 - To work towards the dissolution of the military regime and the restoration of democracy in Burma.
 - To enhance the participation of women in all areas of socio-political activity and to promote human rights awareness among the masses.





KAREN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION (KWO)

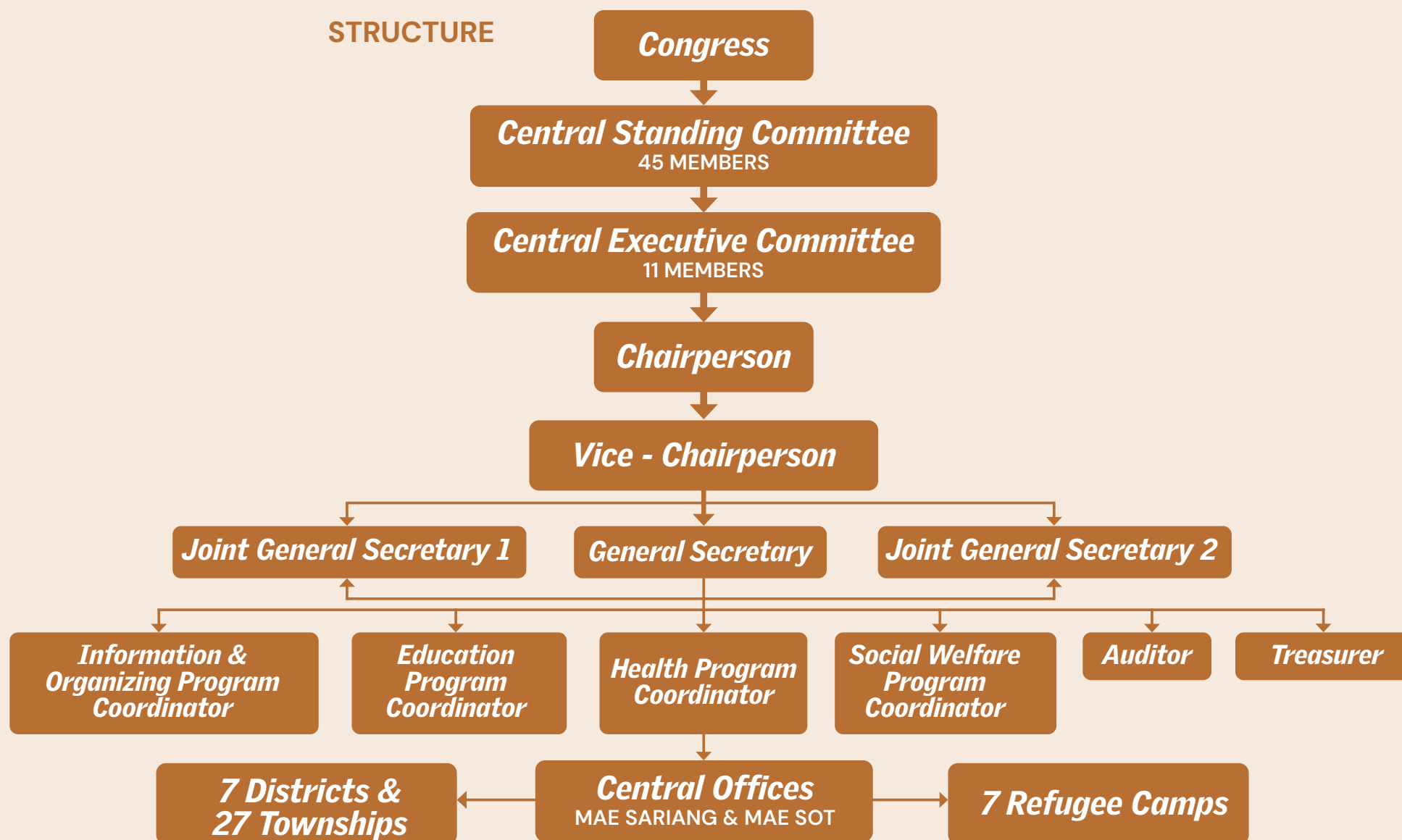
FOUNDING DAY 5 APRIL 1985

OF MEMBERS ABOUT 70,000

VISION In a federal Burma, all communities have gender equality, the protection and promotion of indigenous people's rights, human rights, and justice.

MISSION KWO is an ethnic women's community-based organization that empowers women so they have capacity and power to solve their own problems and participate in decision-making that will affect their lives. KWO participates in the struggle to stop all kinds of oppression of women and of children and provides support for communities in the Thai-Burma border and in Karen State, Burma.

STRUCTURE



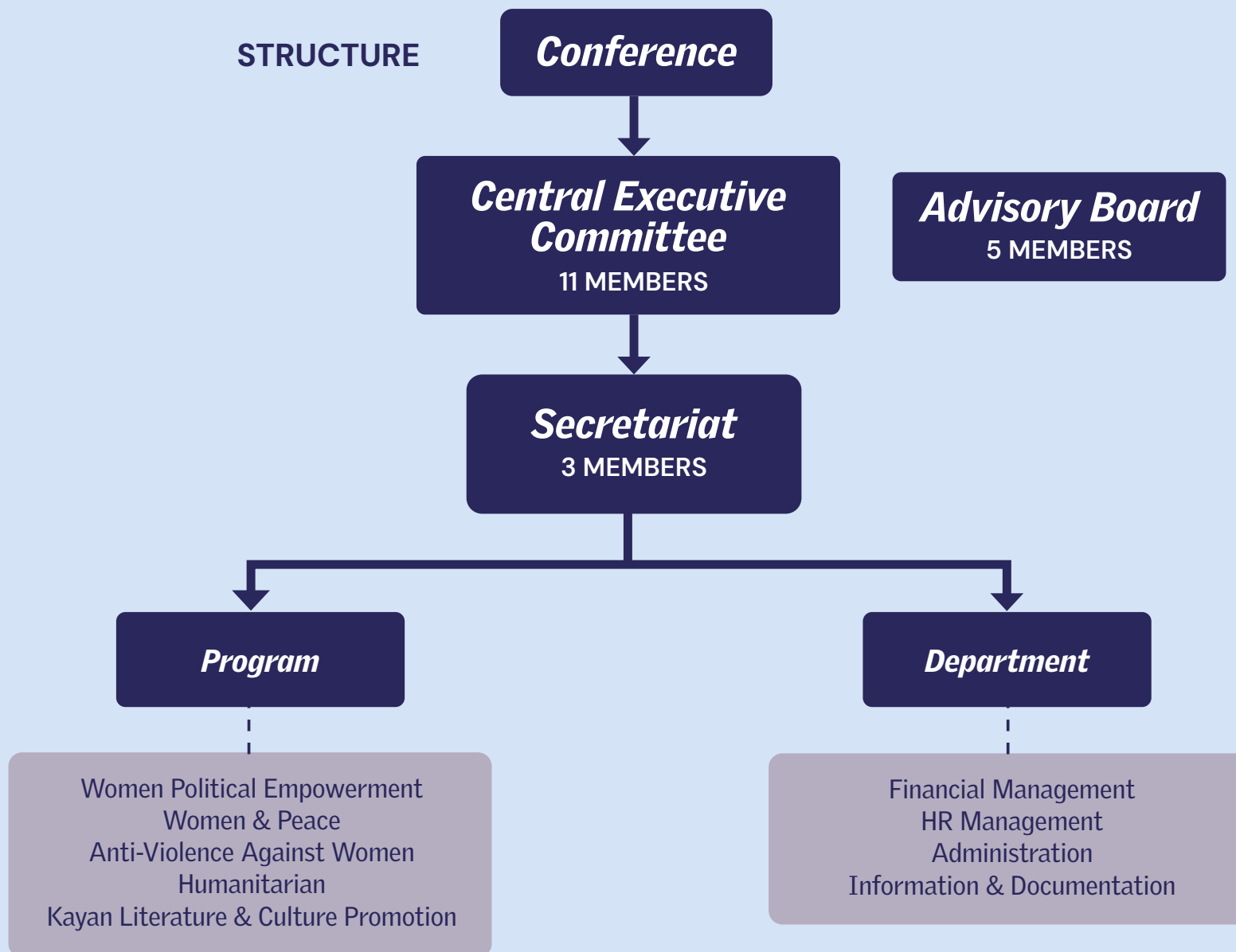


KAYAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION (KyWO)

FOUNDING DAY	3 JANUARY 2008
# OF MEMBERS	560+

VISION The Kayan Women's Organization is dedicated to the emergence of a good federal democratic governance system, basic human rights, and increasing the leadership role of women in political roles such as peace and women's rights and their participation in decision-making roles.

STRUCTURE





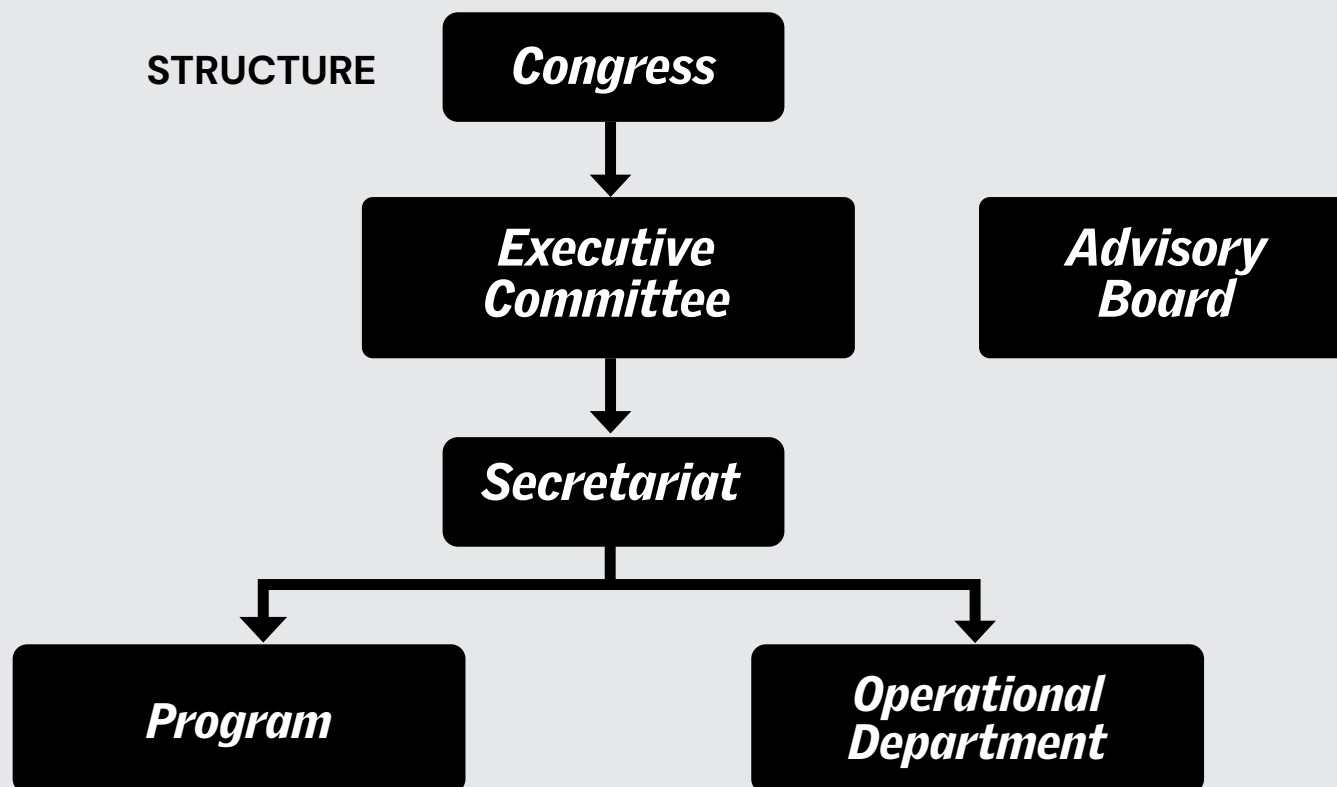
PA-O WOMEN'S UNION (PWU)

FOUNDING DAY	5 NOVEMBER 1999
# OF MEMBERS	100+

VISION Pa-O Women's Union envisions an equal, just, and peaceful federal democratic union, with Pa-O women participating in all levels of decision-making.

MISSION Our mission is to end all forms of violations and discrimination against Pa-O women so that they can fully enjoy their rights and enhance the quality of their lives.

STRUCTURE





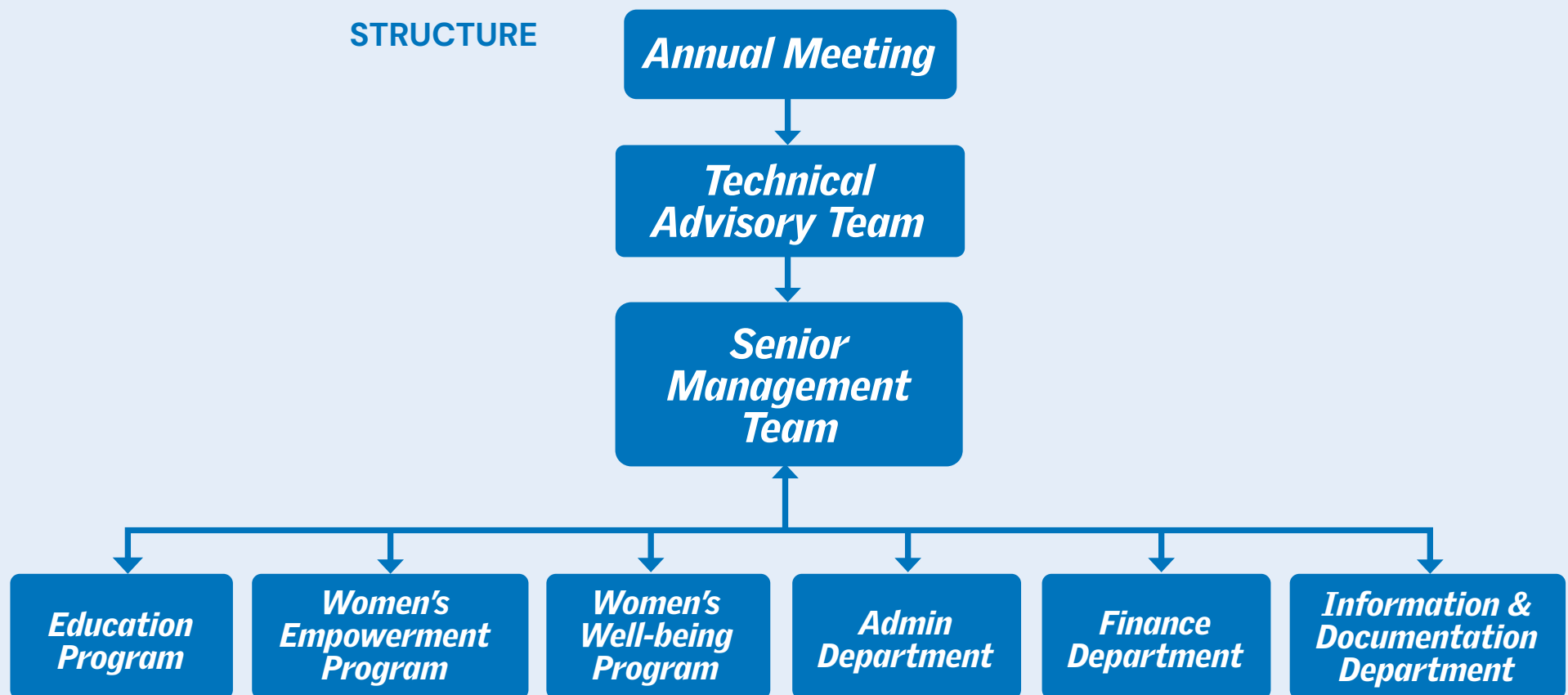
SHAN WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK (SWAN)

FOUNDING DAY	28 MARCH 1999
# OF MEMBERS	300+

VISION SWAN is envisioning Union of Burma, as a federal democratic country, premised on social and political justice, gender and ethnic equality.

MISSION SWAN is committed to strengthening gender equality and justice for all women of Burma in their struggle for social and political rights through community-based actions, research and advocacy among Shan communities and through networking with local, national and international women.

STRUCTURE





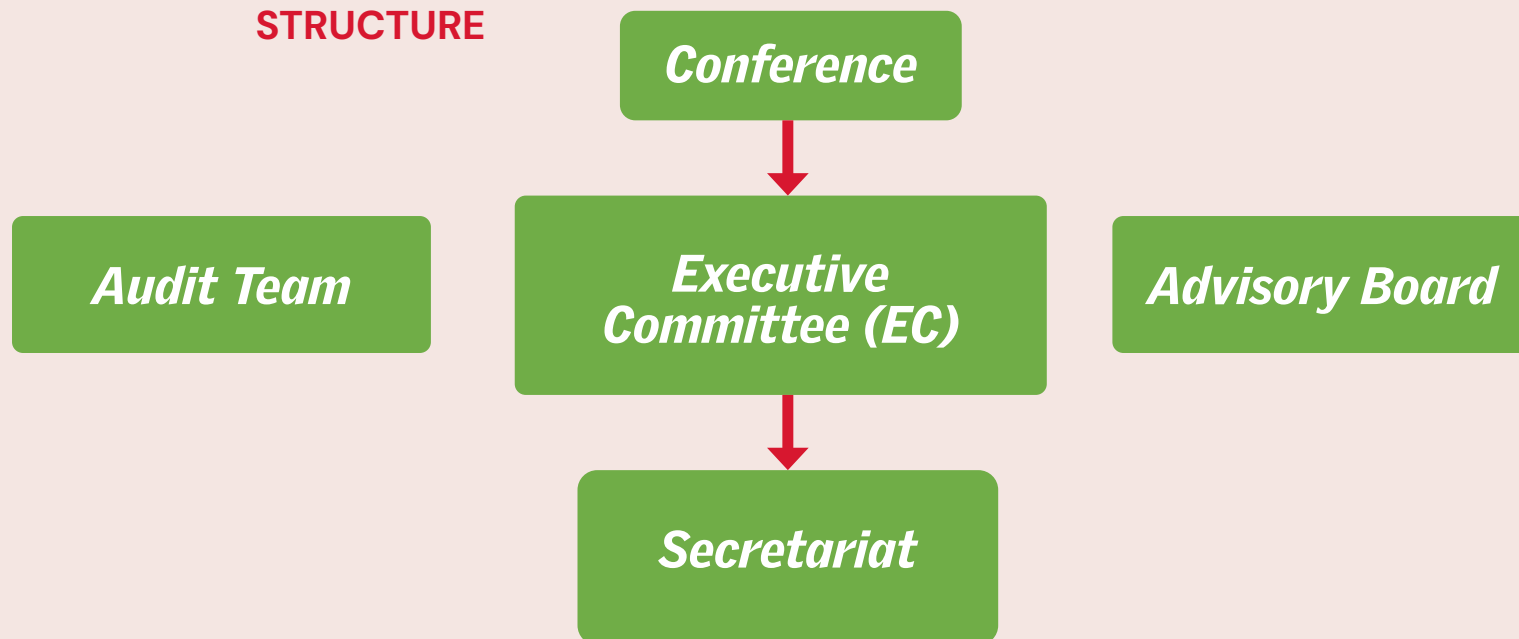
TA'ANG WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION (TWO)

FOUNDING DAY	14 OCTOBER 2000
# OF MEMBERS	650+

VISION We want a federal and democratic society with peace, equality, and justice in the community.

MISSION We, TWO, stand as an activist women's organisation, who will actively advocate, support and do awareness raising for advancing the status of women and girls, promoting inclusive development and women's participation at every decision-making level including politics by moving forward justice.

STRUCTURE





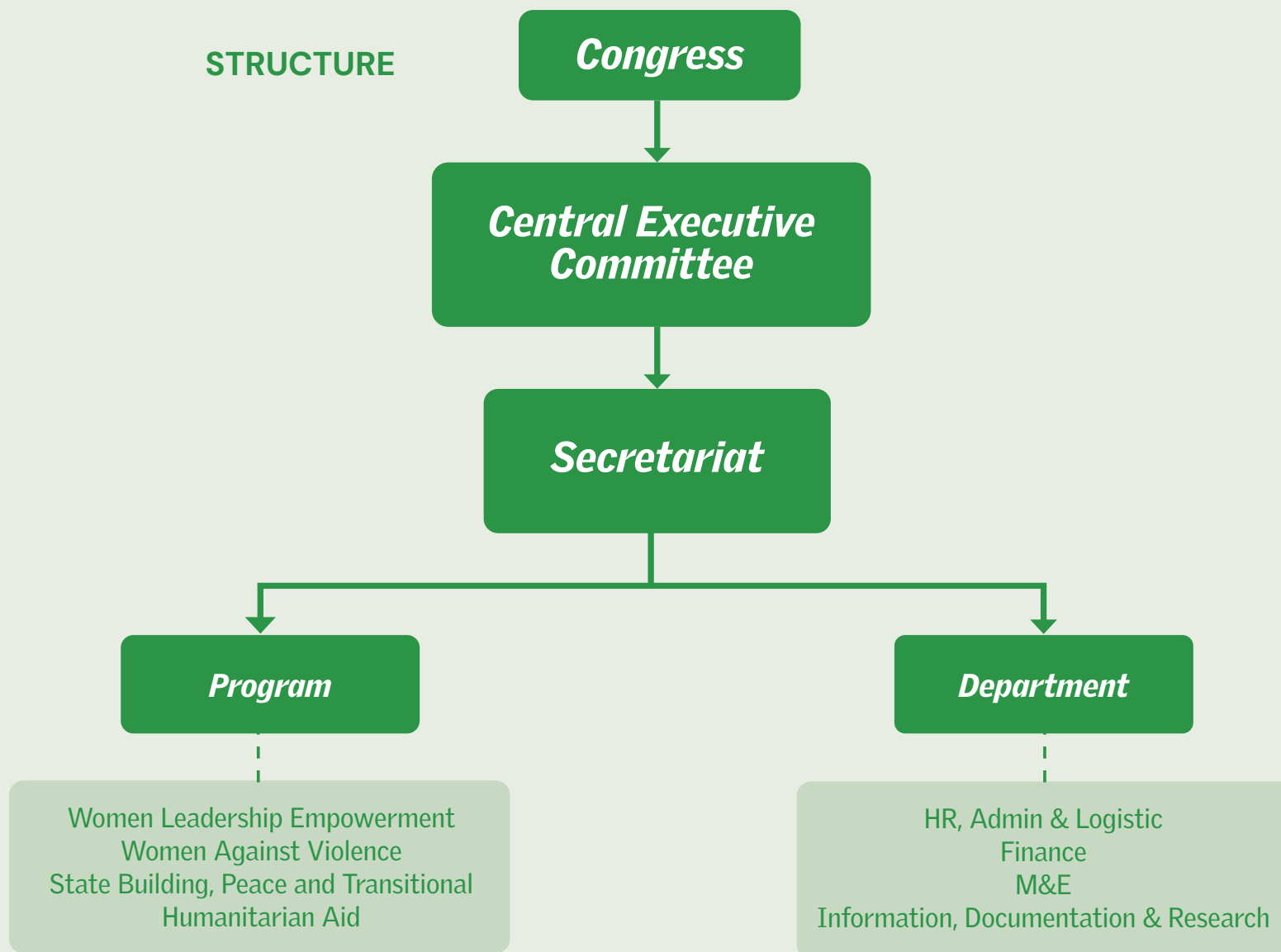
TAVOYAN WOMEN'S UNION (TWU)

FOUNDING DAY	5 MAY 1995
# OF MEMBERS	300 +

VISION To establish a peaceful, justice, equal and liberated society in Burma

MISSION The Tavoyan Women's Union will stand up for the Tavoyan people's right to self-determination and advocate for women's participation in all political leadership roles.

STRUCTURE





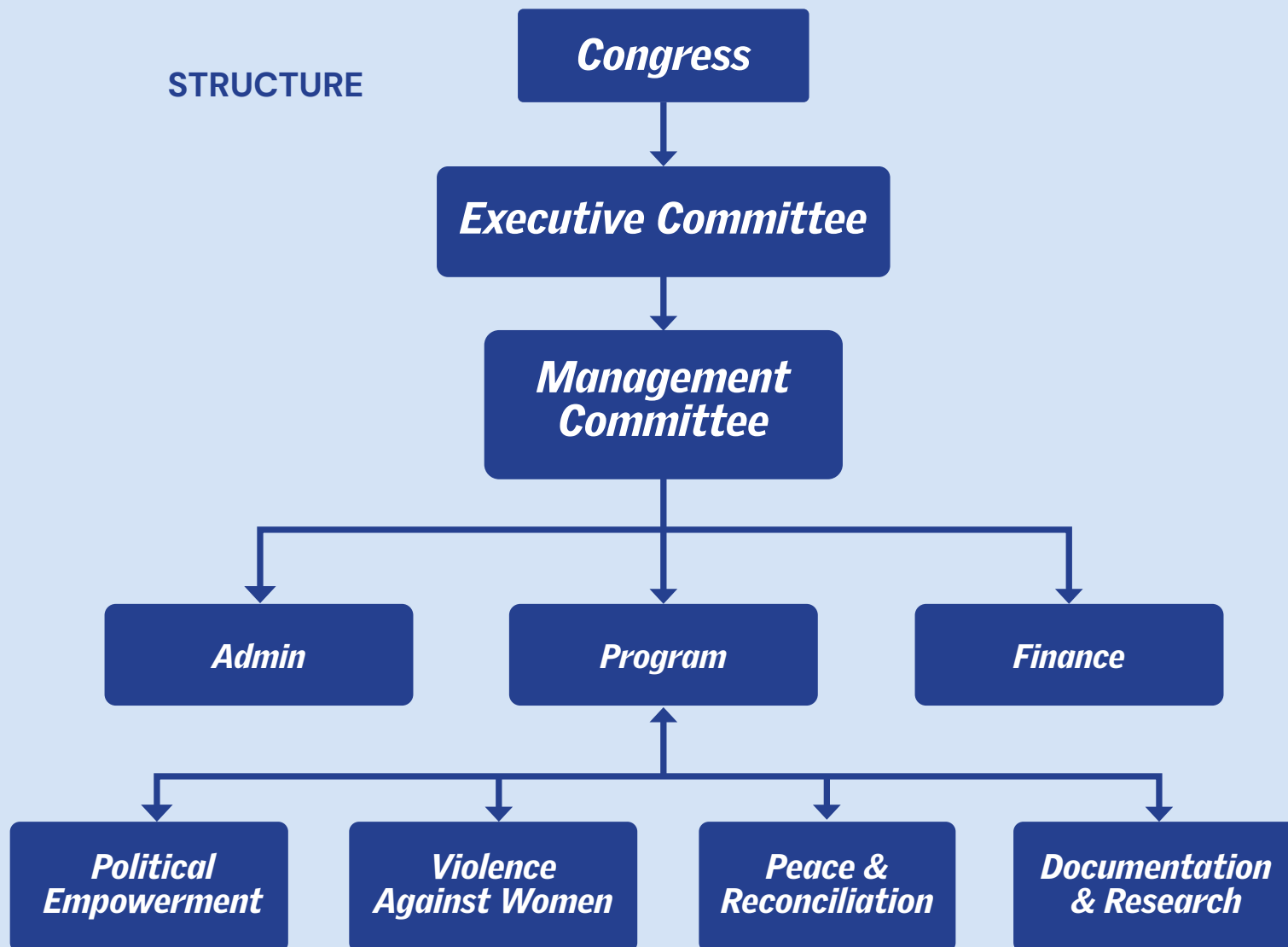
WOMEN FOR JUSTICE (WJ)

FOUNDING DAY	17 FEBRUARY 1995
# OF MEMBERS	50+

VISION Towards a federal democratic society that embraces sustainable peace, women’s security, and gender equality

MISSION WJ works for women’s safety and welfare, emergence of competent women leaders, women’s meaningful participation in decision-making process, and progressing toward a community that cherishes sustainable peace and equality

STRUCTURE

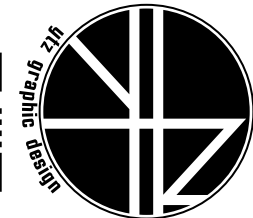


Donors & Partners from 1999 to the Present

No.	Donors	1999-2010	2011-2020	2021-2024
1	1000 Peace Women			
2	Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF)			
3	Aegis Preventing Crimes Against Humanity			
4	American Jewish World Service (AJWS)			
5	Asia Justice & Rights (AJAR)			
6	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)			
7	Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)			
8	Burma Relief Centre (BRC)			
9	British Embassy			
10	Canada Fund			
11	Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA)			
12	Den Danske Burma Komité (Danish Burma Committee)			
13	DanChurchAid - Norwegian Church Aid (DCA NCA)			
14	Euro Burma Office (EBO)			
15	European Commission			
16	Embassy of the Netherlands (Thailand & Myanmar)			
17	FHI 360			
18	Foundation For A Just Society (FJS)			
19	Forum-Asia			
20	Friedrich -Ebert-Stiftung (FES)			
21	Global Fund For Women			
22	Hivos People Unlimited			

No.	Donors	1999-2010	2011-2020	2021-2024
23	Internews			
24	International Media Support (IMS)			
25	International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)			
26	International Republican Institute (IRI)			
27	International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)			
28	International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP)			
29	Joint Peace Fund (JPF)			
30	Legal Action Worldwide (LAW)			
31	Madeleine K. Albright Democracy Award (MKAB)			
32	Mama Cash			
33	Myanmar Trust UK			
34	Nexus Response Mechanism (NRM)			
35	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB)			
36	National Democratic Institute (NDI)			
37	National Endowment for Democracy (NED)			
38	Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI)			
39	Norwegian Burma Committee (NBC)			
40	Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)			
41	Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)			
42	Norwegian University of Life Sciences			
43	Olof Palme International Center (OPC)			
44	Open Society Institute (OSI) / Open Society Foundation (OSF)			

No.	Donors	1999-2010	2011-2020	2021-2024
45	Partners Asia			
46	Paungsei Facility			
47	PeaceNexus Foundation			
48	Planet Wheeler Foundation			
49	Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF)			
50	Saferworld			
51	Swedish Burma Committee (SBC)			
52	Tharti Myay Foundation (TMF)			
53	The Border Consortium (TBC)			
54	Trocaire			
55	The Carter Center			
56	The Fund for Global Human Rights			
57	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)			
58	Urgent Aciton Fund for Women (UAF)			
59	UNOPS			
60	University of Ottawa (Canada)			
61	Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)			
62	Weaving Women's Voices in Southeast Asia, Manila, Philippines (WEAVE)			
63	Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau (WLB)			
64	Women's Fund Asia (WFA)			



Designed by Ying Tzarm
December 2024



*ADVANCING THE STATUS OF
WOMEN TOWARDS A PEACEFUL,
JUST AND FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC
UNION OF BURMA.*



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