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Women's League of Burma

Statement by the Women's League of Burma

Ongoing Tatmadaw offensives and impunity for war crimes undermine new Panglong peace initiative

Date: 16th June, 2016

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) is seriously concerned at the Tatmadaw's recent new offensives and ongoing impunity for war crimes, which are undermining the government's new peace initiatives.

Since the new government took office in late March, the Tatmadaw has reinforced its troops and launched new large-scale ground and air offensives in Kachin and Shan States. Villages have been bombed, civilians tortured and killed, and homes deliberately burned down. Thousands have been newly displaced, joining the hundreds of thousands facing untold hardship and trauma in IDP camps around the country.

Yet there has been no sign of condemnation against the Tatmadaw from the government, and efforts by ethnic MPs to have the conflict debated in parliament have been blocked.

Meanwhile, perpetrators of past crimes such as the rape-murder of the two Kachin teachers in Kawng Kha village in January 2015, remain scot free. On May 18, justice was further delayed when police refused to allow the Kachin Baptist Convention's investigation team to directly question Tatmadaw personnel from Light Infantry Battalion 503, stationed in the village at the time of the crime.

Chillingly, troops from the very same battalion, 503, took part in last month's offensives against the Shan State Progressive Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in Kyaukme and other areas of northern Shan State, in which civilians were tortured, killed and burned. Evidently, without an end to military impunity, such crimes will be repeated again and again.

The systematic abuses being inflicted on ethnic civilians must stop now. It is urgently needed for the government to start reining in the power of the military institution they share office with, and which their national budget is funding.

Without an end to ongoing offensives and war crimes, there can be no trust in the government's new peace initiatives, including the planned 21st Century Panglong Conference.

The government must take action so that the Tatmadaw stops their offensives and human rights violations, and pulls their troops back from the ethnic areas, so that a genuine peace process can take place.

WLB urges foreign envoys to publicly denounce the Tatmadaw's offensives and abuses, which undermine the peace process, and to stop all military-to-military relations with the Tatmadaw. WLB calls on donors to provide adequate humanitarian assistance to those newly displaced, as well as to continue supporting refugees and IDPs who remain unable to return home in safety.

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