



## **KAREN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY PLEDGE FOR PARITY – A CALL FOR ACTION**

8th March 2016

On this International Women's Day 2016, KWO recognizes and pays tribute to all women around the world who dedicate their lives to fighting for women's human rights, equality, justice and women's participation in decision making at all levels. On this important day 3,500 Karen women and supporters are marching at 8 sites both in Karen State and in the Karen refugee camps in Thailand calling for a full Pledge for Parity and action by the Karen National Union (KNU), Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) and the Government of Burma leaders to take a Pledge for Parity.

It is time for action on the commitments they have all made to women.

Karen women have played vital roles in the struggle for Karen people's human rights, self determination, and democracy. KWO members and leaders, along with other Karen women, have worked tirelessly; speaking out against abuses, taking responsibility in conflict areas and in the refugee camps to provide services and leadership. Our 2010 report, "Walking Amongst Sharp Knives" documented the experiences of the many women who stepped forward as village chiefs beginning in the 1980's in an effort to protect our communities and provide leadership. The report documented that those women leaders experienced or witnessed crucifixions, people being burned alive, rape, many forms of torture, including beatings and "water torture", people buried up to their heads in earth and beaten to death, arbitrary executions, beheadings, and of course the common demand and use of slave labor. Despite the horrors experienced by women leaders we have continued to play a leadership role in our community and our struggle for justice. Zipporah Sein has served as the Vice Chairperson of KNU, Secretary of KNU, Secretary of KWO, a head teacher, and leader of countless delegations to International leaders about the Karen struggle. Dr Cynthia Maung established the Mae Tao Clinic and has provided care for thousands of Karen people in desperate need of healthcare. Blooming Night Zan serves as an Executive Committee member of the Karen Refugee Committee helping to lead the management of Karen refugee camps in Thailand. The number of women who are now serving as MP's in Burma has doubled this year, though there are still far too few. Currently, Nan Khin Htwe Myint serve as the executive member in the parliament and she is reelected as the member of the parliament in this election. . Women like Naw Ohn Hla, have been willing to stand up and speak out for the rights of villagers. We call for her release from prison where she's been held as a political prisoner since December of 2014. This International Women's Day 2016 should be a time when all women political prisoners are released. KWO will be highlighting more than 50 Karen women leaders who have been dedicated to our people in a wide variety of leadership capacities.

We honor all these women today. They are our heroines and we humbly follow in their footsteps.

Naw K'nyaw Paw, Secretary of KWO said today in reference to Karen women leaders, "These women have made enormous contributions to our people. They should be honored today by the KNU, by EAOs, and the Government of Burma finally meeting their commitments to women's participation in leadership and

especially in the peace process.<sup>1</sup> These three important organizations have all committed in a variety of ways to full equality for women including in leadership, to 30% representation in the peace process and on their governing boards, and to take all the necessary steps to make that a reality. None of them have met those commitments. International Women's Day 2016 should mark the day they finally do”

Naw K'nyaw Paw went on to say, “The Government of Burma's own constitution prohibits discrimination against women and calls for true equality in all areas of life. The United Nations, which they are members of, has said that women's participation in decision-making roles in peace negotiations is vital to lasting peace.

A simple look at the Government delegation at every ceasefire negotiations table over the past 4 years demonstrates their failure to meet those commitments.

It is time to make parity a reality.

The KNU's constitution calls for 30% representation in governance and they have agreed to 30% representation at the peace table, but they have ignored their own commitment.

It is time to make parity a reality.

The EAOs have similarly committed to 30% representation in the political dialog.

It is time to make parity a reality.

We are saying together, now is our time. Our right to parity is long overdue. Every day Karen women make a contribution to the education, health, social welfare, business, and development of our community. We demand action today.”

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1 Documents indicated these commitments include: 2008 Constitution of Burma, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Geneva Call – Deed of Commitment.