

16 Days of Activism to Stop Violence Against Women

KWO Message: On-going Sexual Violence by Burma Army

During this current 16 Day Campaign to increase awareness about Violence Against Women, KWO feels **obligated to raise our voices about the on-going use of rape and other forms of violence against women by the Burma Army.**

In Burmese military operations in Arakan State over the past months, there have been consistent reports received of widespread, systematic sexual violence against Rohingya women by Burma Army troops. In a little over one month, **192 reports have been received of incidents of rape committed by Burma military.** We are deeply pained by these reports, which revive memories of similar horrors endured for decades by women in our communities at the hands of the Burma Army. Other reports continue to emerge of the widespread use of torture, unlawful killings, and disappearances suffered by the Rohingya people at the hands of the Burma Army soldiers. Cases of 428 deaths, and 192 disappearances of Rohingya people have been documented. Our hearts go out to the Rohingya women and their families at this time.

We are further saddened by the NLD government's denial of these reports of sexual and physical violence by Burma Army troops. **We expected the Army to deny the reports, as they always have, but we did not expect the NLD to do the same.** We had higher hopes also from Nobel Peace Laureate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In 2011 she said "Rape is used in my country as a weapon against those who only want to assert their basic human rights, especially in the areas of the ethnic nationalities. Rape is rife. It is used as a weapon by the armed forces to intimidate the ethnic nationalities and to divide our country." So we had such hope that sexual violence by Burmese soldiers would not be allowed to happen if DASSK was in power, or if it did happen, she would quickly take action, or speak out against it. We see now that these were empty political words.

In June 2014, **Burma signed the "Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict"**. There was a lot of media publicity, and the Burma government smiled with Hollywood movie stars in London under the limelight of world attention. We wonder when will be the right time for Burma to act on their promises. There are 12 commitments in that Declaration they signed and none of them have been honoured as yet. **Burmese soldiers continue to rape with impunity.** How are signatories to the Declaration held to account?

From 2005 to 2016, eleven women's organization from Burma, **published at least 33 separate reports on the violence against women perpetrated by the soldiers of the Burma Army.** All of this evidence has been denied by the Burma Army and Burma governments. Denial, then impunity, is the pattern of behavior we have observed for generations. Is it possible all these women are lying? Or could it be true that soldiers of the Burma Army are aggressive and abuse their power and are not held to account?

Burma Army soldiers are well-trained and well-equipped. They have jet fighters bombing villages in Kachin State; there are many officers; a chain of command; penalties for disobeying orders, like most armies in the world. For Burma Army soldiers to rape with impunity, on this scale and for this length of time, it requires the collusion of the whole national military hierarchy. **When soldiers rape and nothing is done, their commanders are also guilty.** When nothing is done by commanders, no order disseminated that rape will not be tolerated, the whole army and the national government are all guilty.

In honour of the courage of women in Myanmar, we ask Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD government today, to make a simple nation-wide announcement: **"Sexual violence is prohibited to members of the Myanmar Army. Any Myanmar soldier found to have committed this crime, and his commanding officers, will be severely punished."**