



Karen Women's Organization, KWO
Statement on International Women's Day March 8, 2019
"Courage to Speak, Ending Impunity Now"

This year marks the 108th year of International Women's Day. It is extremely important that we look back celebrating the progress and achievements of women all over the world. It is equally important we commit to continuing the fight for what we believe, overcoming all the challenges we face.

We have come so far. Sadly, we still have a long road to travel but not an impassable one. The Women's League of Burma's theme for International Women's Day this year is "Access to Justice, End Impunity Now", while the International theme is "Better for Balance". We support the ever more urgent need to fight for justice and to end the impunity that allows the Burmese military to commit atrocities. We also know it is long overdue for women to take their rightful place in the world and balance representation everywhere. Our world will be a better place when we achieve that goal.

The Karen Women's Organization is honored this year to accept the "International Women of Courage Award" from the US State Department. We were given this award for our "position regarding the need to end military violence against civilians, for speaking out about the violence against the Rohingya, and speaking out against SGBV in conflict." We know how hard it is to have the courage to speak the truth about what is being done against women in our community and women across Burma. We also know we can never win justice and end impunity without the brave voices of those who have suffered at the hands of the military and those of us who support them and bear witness to the crimes committed against them. It is vital that women have the courage to speak out against injustice everywhere. Our theme and call on International Women's Day is "Courage to Speak, Ending Impunity Now".

In Burma, we need the courage to speak out against impunity and injustice. The Burmese Army holds great power in politics, economics, and social areas. They have power in virtually every aspect of our lives. Their actions and power create fear in us. Despite that fear women must step forward with courage to demand equal participation in community leadership, in politics, and in the peace process. We need to summon our courage to challenge military impunity, to up stand for ourselves and our children. We must demand changes to the "2008 Constitution" which allows the Burmese military to hold themselves above the law and over our lives. We need to summon our courage to stand and speak for the voiceless. We all must summon the courage to demand justice.

In the last year, we have seen courage all around us. We saw the courage of the Karen, Kachin and Karenni youth to demand that their own identity and history be honored rather than someone else's and to protest to save their people and land. We saw the courage of the Burma Parliament when it began demanding a constitutional review. We saw the courage of people who spoke out and fought back as their land was stolen. We saw the courage of people in cities as they showed their support for ethnic people speaking out.

We need more of these courageous people in Burma. We need courage not only to speak for ourselves but also for others who are being treated in a way that is against our values and principles. KWO calls on all women in Burma to have the courage to speak out even when we are afraid, to do the right thing when it matters. We cannot let people stand alone. We must stand with them. Fear holds back so many, but stepping forward is what can make us free. KWO will hold International Women's Day events at 15 sites in the refugee camps in Thailand and in Karen State, Burma. We will be highlighting our achievements and will be recommitting to having the courage to speak and to ending the impunity of the Burmese military. We hope you will join us wherever you are, to show your solidarity and support.

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