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WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA

Press Release on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 25 November 2017

Today, to coincide with the 2017 International Day to stop Violence against Women, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) launches a briefing paper titled, "Girls Bear the Shame". The briefing paper sheds light on the experience of women and girls who have survived sexual violence in Burma, and highlights the challenges and barriers in seeking justice for these crimes. The briefing paper offers recommendations related to legal and policy reform to the Burma Government to end violence against women and girls.

According to the WLB's documentation of sexual violence, particularly in non-conflict ethnic areas, and the data released by Burma's National Police record, between 2016 and 2017, cases of sexual violence against women and girls across Burma has drastically increased - especially among girls.

The briefing paper also finds that there have been no effective legal actions taken against perpetrators, particularly in ethnic areas. Women and girls have been unable to find justice and the perpetrators enjoy impunity, thus allowing these crimes to continue to take place. The lack of an independent and effective legal system and protection laws for women are the root causes of impunity while women who seek justice often face intimidation, threats, torture and reprisal to force them to remain silent.

Lway Poe Ngeal, General Secretary of Women's League of Burma, said, "We are gravely concerned about this situation that women and girls across the country are currently facing as there is no way for them to seek justice which lead them traumatize situation while there is a lack of physical and emotional protection."

As the theme of this year's International Day to Stop Violence against Women on November 25th 2017, "Leave no one Behind" WLB earnestly calls on the government of Burma to address this situation of violence against women and girls across Burma with urgency and priority in compliance with its obligation to implement the CEDAW by taking all effective measures necessary to ensure no women and girls are left behind and their rights are protected and access to justice is provided.

The **"Girls Bear the Shame"** paper recommends the Burma Government to –

1. Provide State funding for victim services, including professional mental health services and witness protection for children and all survivors of sexual violence.
2. Revise the Child Law to establish a minimum sentence for sexual violence against children.
3. Revise the Penal Code to broaden the scope of criminalized sexual violence to meet international standards.
4. Conduct awareness-raising among Members of Parliament and government staff about the rights of women and children.
5. Conduct public awareness-raising about sexual violence, and the rights of women and children in both urban and rural ethnic areas.
6. Invest greater resources to promote the human rights of and equality for women and girls in ethnic areas.

7. Pass the Protection and Prevention of Violence Against Women Bill into law immediately, and continue to consult with women's organizations to ensure that the law is effectively protecting the rights of women and girls in Burma.
8. Increase the number of women in front-line staff positions, including police officers and mental health workers.
9. Conduct child and gender-sensitivity training amongst police officers, counselors and other front line staff who work with survivors.
10. Develop a national health care system in which care is distributed effectively, equitably and transparently, well-equipped public health facilities are available and comprehensive public and reproductive health education is offered, particularly in rural areas.

Although this paper emphasizes the sexual violence experienced by women and girls in non-conflict ethnic areas, the WLB is extremely concerned of the ongoing rape and sexual violence committed by the Burmese military in conflict-affected ethnic areas and the impunity that the military continues to enjoy as protected by the 2008 Constitution. WLB sees this is a major obstacle for Burma's democratic transition, peaceful society and development of the life of women. WLB calls on the civilian government to implement its responsibility to prevent these crimes and protect women by bringing the Burma military under civilian rule and hold perpetrators to account.

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