



## **International Women's Day Karen Women's Organization Statement**

Date: March 8, 2018

### **OUR TIME IS NOW!**

The Karen Women's Organization, on the occasion of International Women's Day 2018, wishes to celebrate all the Karen women who have struggled for, worked for, and demanded our rights as women and human beings. Women around the world are saying the time for oppression and discrimination against women is over. **Our time is now!** The members of the Karen Women's Organization have been working for equality for more than 3 decades. We, as indigenous women, have experienced being treated as less than others all our lives. But Karen women have long stood up to be counted. We will continue to do so until every Karen woman, and all women everywhere, can live full lives with all their rights and respect granted.

This year in 2018 we particularly want to celebrate two of our leaders who have reached milestones in the past year. P'doh Naw Dah Dah a member of our Executive Committee and long time leader of women refugees was elected to the Karen National Union Executive Committee. We know she speaks with our voice and stands for Karen women and the entire Karen community every day. Her long service and leadership are rocks we stand on as we continue to struggle for full rights and dignity.

We also celebrate a much newer leader who will help carry Karen women into the future, Naw Hser Hser. Naw Hser Hser recently received the Phan Foundation P'doh Mahn Sha young leader award in acknowledgment of her commitment, passion and contribution to Karen women and the Karen community. We are honored to have both these remarkable women as part of the Karen Women's Organization.

Even as we celebrate the incredible women among us, we also know that the Burma Army is currently entering Mutraw District in Karen State in large numbers, reports indicate almost 600 Burmese soldiers, causing hundreds of women and children to flee in fear. As we mark this day of celebration our hearts are with them as yet another group of women and children suffer at the hands of the Burma Army.

We also remember those who stood up for the rights of women and lost their lives. Particularly we remember Naw Paw Boh Htoo, a KWO member, who was killed protecting another woman from a violent husband. He murdered this brave KWO member for helping her Karen sister. She is not the first, we hope she will be one of the last.

Finally, we cannot ignore on this day of celebration the incredible abuse by the Burma Army of Rohingya women. The use of rape and murder by the Army is well documented. We have personally experienced rape as a weapon of war by the Burma Army. We had hoped we were one of the last groups of women to suffer at their hands. Sadly, we were not. It is time to put an end to that abuse and refer General Min Aung Hlaing to the International Criminal Court. It is time to place meaningful sanctions on the Army until real peace, democracy and human rights are established. **Their time is up.** We have already waited too long, our time is now. **No woman from Burma of any background should experience these attacks, not the Rohingya, not the Shan, not the Kachin and not the Karen.** We should not suffer at the hands of our husbands and we should not suffer at the hands of the Burma Army.

The Karen Women's Organization celebrates today all Karen women who are fighting back, who are refusing to be controlled and oppressed. It is time to welcome us into the highest levels of community leadership both within the Karen community and within Burma more broadly. We have served and led for many years. Our time, is now.

We call on the International community to stand with women across Burma to put an end to the abuses by the Army, the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and all forms of violence used to keep women down. Our time is now. Join us.

Executive Committee  
KWO Central