

Petition calling for Tatmadaw to immediately withdraw its troops and cease military road construction in northern Mutraw (Hpapun) District, Karen State.

Date: March 27, 2018

Her Excellency Daw Aung San Suu Kyi  
State Counsellor  
Republic of the Union of Burma/Myanmar

Dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:

We, the Indigenous Karen leaders of 16 villages in Luthaw Township, northern Mutraw (Hpapun) District, draw your attention to over 2,000 villagers who have fled their homes due to an ongoing Tatmadaw offensive that began on March 4, 2018. Tatmadaw soldiers, who plan to build a military operation road through our lands and villages, have shot at us and our livestock and repeatedly clashed with KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army) soldiers.

In the past, we made our living by cultivating rice fields and raising livestock, and we enjoyed abundance. However, between 1974 and 2010, the Tatmadaw launched repeated large-scale offensives against the KNU (Karen National Union) in our area. The soldiers murdered civilians, slaughtered our livestock, looted and burned our villages, and destroyed our food supplies, forcibly displacing us over and over again. Many of our fellow villagers were forced to flee to Thailand as refugees. Decades of these Tatmadaw abuses have so traumatized us that mere mention of the Tatmadaw brings back nightmares.

In 2012, the KNU signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government, leading us to believe that the Tatmadaw would stop attacking us, withdraw its troops from our lands and allow us to return and rebuild our villages. However, contrary to our expectations, Tatmadaw troops have not withdrawn; instead, they have built more bases and fortified existing camps. Now, the Tatmadaw's actions threaten us once again.

The Tatmadaw's military roads in our homeland are a source of great fear for us, since they facilitate movement of troops and transport of heavy weapons into our areas. We are often in danger of being shot by Tatmadaw soldiers near these roads. For example, Saw Maw Kay, a Khershorter Community Forest ranger in Luthaw township, was shot dead by Tatmadaw soldiers on at 10:00 AM on February 22, 2015 while he and other villagers were clearing their upland rotational farms.

Now, advancing Tatmadaw soldiers once again threaten our safety. Since February 27, 2018, soldiers have shot at villagers on at least 4 occasions while some of us were collecting our rice. Furthermore, the Tatmadaw's plan to construct a military operation road threatens to permanently displace us from our ancestral lands and villages, pushing us into poverty and food insecurity. Nearly 2,300 of our villagers, including elders, women and children, have already fled their homes and are now hiding in the forest, while more than 600 additional villagers are at risk of being driven from their homes as well. In this mountainous region, it is cold at night, and displaced villagers are suffering from psychological trauma and other illnesses, exacerbated by food and medicine shortages.

We are Indigenous people, and we have a deep spiritual connection to our ancestral lands. The Tatmadaw's planned military road would desecrate our sacred mountains, forests, and graveyards, as well as the sacred fields of Ler Mu Plaw. The ongoing occupation of our lands by the Tatmadaw, and the prolonged displacement situation, continues to undermine our ability to steward our customary lands (*Kaw*), perform our sacred ceremonies, and practice our cultural identity as Indigenous Karen people.

As fellow human beings, we humbly ask Her Excellency to empathize with us, listen to our cry and understand our suffering. We implore Her Excellency to stand up for us so that we can live free from fear and provide for our families in peace.

Therefore, we sincerely appeal to Her Excellency to use her power and influence as State Counsellor to:

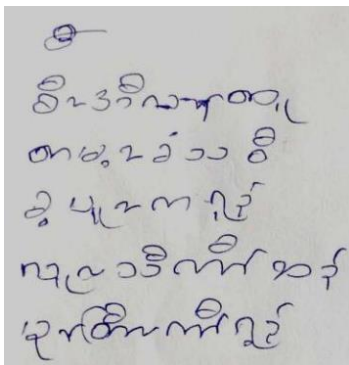
1. Press for an immediate end to Tatmadaw offensives and the withdrawal of Tatmadaw troops from our lands and villages.
2. Call upon the Tatmadaw to immediately cease all road construction activities in our area.
3. Advocate for withdrawal of the 17 previously-identified Tatmadaw camps in Mutraw (Hpapun) district which are close to villagers' lands and threaten our lives, livelihoods, and internationally-recognized rights as Indigenous peoples to freely practice our spiritual traditions.
4. Urge the Tatmadaw to respect and acknowledge our rights as Indigenous people to decide our own futures and engage in community-driven development that is compatible with our needs, our vision for peace, and our cultural values.

Sincerely Yours,

Indigenous Karen village leaders  
Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts  
Luthaw Township  
Mutraw (Hpapun) District  
Kawthoolei/Karen State  
Burma/Myanmar

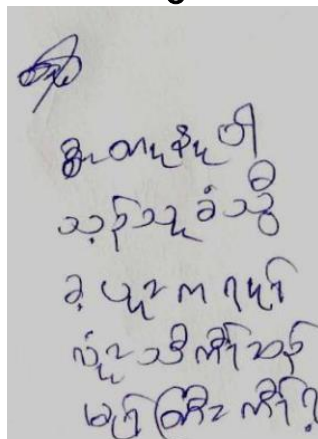
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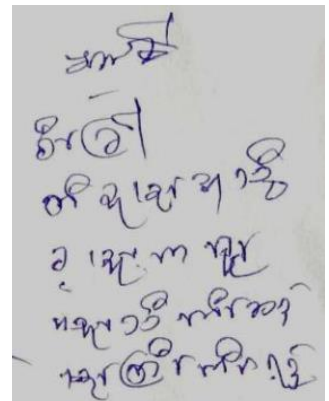
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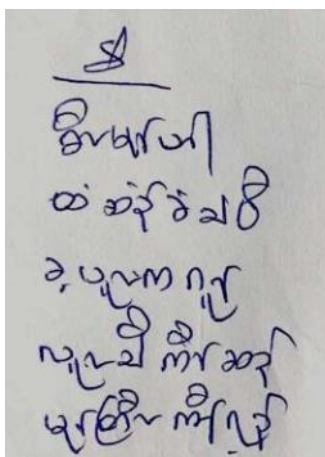
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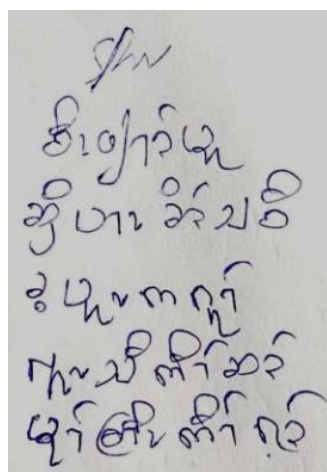
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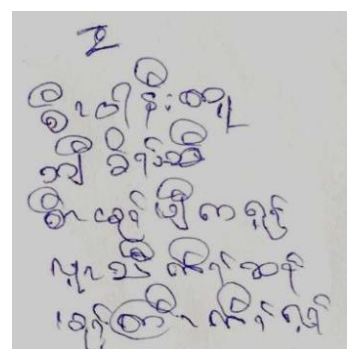
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