WAR IN KACHIN STATE: TRAPPED IDPS AND CHALLENGES FOR PEACE

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The continued offensives by the Burma Army (or Tatmadaw) against the Kachin Independence Army in Kachin State escalated rapidly in April, displacing over 5,000 civilians. On April 30, over 5,000 people protested in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, calling on the government to free more than 3,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) trapped in war zones. Additional protests took place in other major cities across the country including Yangon. Protests led by Kachin diaspora have also been staged at Myanmar embassies around the globe.

The majority of affected civilians remain trapped in dangerous conflict zones, despite multiple letters from religious and civil society organizations urging the Kachin State and Myanmar governments to evacuate the IDPs. Consequently, Kachin youth have set up sit-in protest camps in Myitkyina to call for the rescue of the displaced civilians. If the IDP issue in Kachin State is not solved, similar protests could surface in other states and regions.

The Tatmadaw must stop all of its offensives in Kachin State as well as in other parts of the country. Intensified offensives in Kachin State and else where could further discourage the Kachin Independence Organization and other ethnic armed organizations from approaching the table. The actions of the Tatmadaw undermine the people's trust in the existing peace process and continue to prevent all-inclusive representation of the voices of ethnic people at the upcoming Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong.

Leaders of the ruling party, the National League for Democracy, must stand with the people and ensure the immediate evacuation of the Kachin IDPs. Only then can trust in the peace process be built and efforts for national reconciliation realized.∎