

ASEAN Must Take Immediate Action to Address the Worsening Conflict and Humanitarian Situation in Burma's Kachin State

We, the undersigned solidarity and democracy activists and civil society organisations in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region express our grave concern over the recent escalation of armed conflict and humanitarian crisis in Kachin State, Burma that has resulted in the displacement of thousands of civilians, and urgently call on ASEAN to take immediate action to address the situation before it results in further loss of lives, displacement and human rights violations against one of the most vulnerable populations in the region.

The resumption of war between the Burmese military - otherwise known as the tatmadaw- and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in 2011 has already led to the displacement of over [120,000 civilians](#) in northern Burma. The fighting between the Burmese military and the KIA has intensified since the beginning of this year, which has seen some of the worst offensives since the resumption of war, including the use of heavy artillery and aerial bombings by the Burmese military against civilians and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, leading heavy casualties of civilians and the destruction of properties. The Burmese military has stepped up its offensives during the dry season of April, and as a result, a [further 7,000 people](#) have been displaced to existing and newly established IDP camps in northern Burma.

The movements of those displaced in Kachin State remain restricted by the Burmese military as [hundreds of IDPs remain trapped](#) in conflict-affected forest areas without safe passage and humanitarian aid. In at least three townships across Kachin State - Hpakant, Tanai and Injangyang township - the Burmese military has committed what has been characterized by local organizations as a war crime. The Burmese military have used IDPs as human shields and mine sweepers, obstructing IDPs access to refuge and safe passage, conducted indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombing in civilian areas and IDP camps as well as looted and destroyed civilian property. Furthermore, on June 5 2018, The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement has announced a plan to close camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in four states including Kachin state.

In response to these human rights violations committed against the Kachin civilians, peaceful protesters across Burma - led by a youth movement - have called for the Burma government to provide much needed humanitarian aid and safe passage for the IDPs, with many calling for an end to the ongoing war. The Burmese authorities have responded by violently cracking down on these peaceful protesters, while arresting and charging many of the organizers.

Such disregard for peaceful calls by its own peoples, as well as international humanitarian law and basic human rights principles that underline respect for human life and dignity by the Burmese military and government must not remain unaddressed. The 21st Century Panglong Conference and the peace process have stalled as the Burmese military continues to wage war against ethnic people across Burma, most recently breaking the much-lauded Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Karen State - its offensives against the Karen National Union has led to

further [displacement](#) of 2,400 civilians between March and May. Thus, the dire humanitarian crisis and ongoing human rights violations against civilians in Kachin State and also in Northern Shan State must be viewed as a wider symptom of the unwillingness and inadequacies of the Burmese government to address root causes of all conflicts in Burma - which has been made evident in its response to the situation in Rakhine State where nearly 700,000 Rohingya have fled due to ongoing human rights violations and a brutal military operation by the Burmese military.

The ASEAN as a regional body must urgently respond to this ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis and urge Burma to allow safe passage for those trapped in conflict in Kachin state, and end the ongoing offensives and human rights violations against all ethnic people. The cost of severe violations of human rights including the right to life in Burma is too high a price to pay for the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of its member states. It is time for ASEAN to act to end the ongoing human rights violations against the most vulnerable and marginalized peoples of the region, particularly those who have been displaced due to ongoing conflict in Burma.

In particular, we raise the following recommendations:

For ASEAN:

1. Place all possible diplomatic pressures on the Burma government and military to end military operations in northern Burma and allow unrestricted, unfettered humanitarian access to displaced persons.
2. Mandate the AICHR to address the human rights violations against ethnic minorities in Burma with utmost urgency.
3. Take leadership to find durable solutions with processes that draw input from affected peoples.

For the Burma government:

1. Heed the call of the people in Burma, in the region and the rest of the international community for the immediate cessation of all offensives in ethnic areas;
2. Take all measures necessary to ensure the safety and security of IDPs, particularly of women, children and the most vulnerable population, and ensure that those displaced have access to safe and secure passage;
3. Allow immediate access to all humanitarian aid in Kachin State and other areas affected by the ongoing conflict;

4. Work towards building trust with ethnic people by recognizing their right to self-determination and genuinely work towards a peaceful, federal democratic Burma;

We, the undersigned, commit to take action in solidarity to support the peoples and communities affected by conflict, the IDPs and refugees in the region, who are in dire need of continuing and genuine people-to-people solidarity.

Signatories:

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)
Association for Law, Human Rights, and Justice (HAK)
Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters- HRDP
Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
Community Resource Center (CRC)
Human Rights Foundation of Monland
Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association
Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation
Initiative for International Dialogue (IID)
Judicial System Monitoring Programme (JSMP)
Kachin Women's Association Thailand
Karen Human Rights Group
Karen Women Organization
Karenni National Women's Organization
Mae Tao Clinic
People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF)
PILIPINA Legal Resource Center
Progressive Voice
Pusat KOMAS
Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
Swedish Burma Committee
The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS)

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