



Karen Global Action in Ottawa: A Rally for Peace in Burma/Myanmar

Official Statement by the Karen Community of Canada (KCC)

June 18, 2018

On this day, hundreds of Karen from across Canada are gathered on Parliament Hill to stand up for human rights in their home country of Burma (Myanmar). Thousands of Karen are also gathered today at the United States Capitol in Washington, DC. The International Karen Organization (IKO) has called for a Karen Global Action Movement to protest ongoing Burmese military operations in Karen State. Ethnic Kachin and Rohingya have also staged demonstrations around the world over the past few months.

The human rights situation in Burma today is urgent and getting worse. We stand in solidarity with our Rohingya brothers and sisters, but we are concerned that the international community's singular focus on the situation in Rakhine State is emboldening the Burmese military to act with growing impunity as it intensifies attacks against other ethnic communities, including the Kachin, Shan, Ta'ang, and Karen.

Since March, the Burmese military has deployed over 2000 troops into northern Karen State, violating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). More than 3,000 Karen villagers have been forced to flee their homes and are hiding in the forest. On April 5, Burmese soldiers killed Saw O Moo, an unarmed civilian leader. Many Karen people in Canada come from this part of Karen State, and we worry for our relatives who remain there. If the Burmese military continues to send reinforcements and resumes construction of a planned military road in the area, Karen State could be plunged into renewed civil war.

The Burmese military is manipulating the peace process and the NCA to prolong military rule and crush the Karen and other ethnic resistance groups, disregarding our people's genuine desires for peace and equal human rights in a democratic federal union. The military's actions and ongoing occupation of Karen villagers' lands makes it impossible for hundreds of thousands of Karen IDPs and refugees to return to their villages and ancestral lands.

The Burmese military has never been held to account for decades of human rights violations against ethnic peoples, including the Karen. We hope this is changing, with growing calls for referral of Burmese military leaders to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We thank Canada for supporting such a referral, as well as calling for an International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM). We also support Canada's ongoing sanctions against the Burmese military and military-connected companies contained in the Special Economic Measures (Burma) Regulations – and we hope these sanctions can be further strengthened.

We also thank Canada for its recent announcement of \$300 million in humanitarian assistance for Rohingya and other ethnic peoples fleeing war in Burma, as well as Canada's ongoing support for cross-border aid and support for ethnic civil society in Burma. However, we regret that international food aid to the refugee camps has been scaled down, and cut completely for IDP camps on the Thai-Burma border.

Recommendations to the Canadian Government to Support Peace and Human Rights in Burma

1. Publicly condemn all attacks and human rights abuses by the Burmese military

Canada has invested in Burma's peace process as a contributor to the Joint Peace Fund. We ask Canada and other donors to demand that the Burmese military immediately stop attacking ethnic armed organizations, withdraw troops from ethnic areas, and commit to peaceful negotiations.

2. Increase humanitarian aid to refugees on the Thai-Burma border, and continue support for ethnic civil society

We thank Canada for its ongoing support of ethnic civil society organizations working for peace, justice, and human rights in Burma. We urge resumption of food aid to IDP camps on the Thai-Burma border, and increased aid contributions to the refugee camps, which face cuts to food, education, and other essential services.

3. Provide open and transparent reporting on all Canadian development aid to Burma

We ask Canada to follow the UK Parliament's example¹ and conduct a comprehensive review to ensure that no Canadian tax dollars support the military or centralized government structures that are accused of genocide and continue to oppress ethnic peoples in Burma.

4. Adopt an inclusive and comprehensive approach in calls for an IIIM and referral to ICC

The Burmese military's alleged war crimes include not only atrocities against the Rohingya but also past and ongoing human rights abuses against other ethnic peoples such as the Karen, Kachin, and Shan. Comprehensive investigations are needed to end Burmese military impunity.

5. Impose additional targeted sanctions on Burmese military, government leaders, and military-related companies

We ask Canada to implement sanctions on military and civilian government leaders complicit in human rights abuses in all areas of Burma, including Commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing. We also urge Canada to respect ethnic civil society's calls for a moratorium on resource extraction until stable peace agreements and federal democracy are achieved.

More than 6000 Karen refugees from Burma have resettled across Canada, the majority arriving in 2006-2007. The Karen Community of Canada (KCC) is an umbrella organization that represents Karen people in Canada and promotes Karen culture, human rights and democracy.

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¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/1054/1054.pdf>