

Press Release

HURFOM report shows worrying trend in sexual violence against children in Mon State and Mon areas of southern Burma

**Women and Child Rights Project (WCRP)
Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM)**

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HURFOM's Women and Child Rights Project (WCRP) releases: "A Girl's Life was Destroyed": Sexual violence against children continues to rise in Mon State and Mon areas of southern Burma'. The report documents 14 cases of sexual violence against children, including 11 cases of child rape, which have occurred since June 2017 in Mon State and Mon areas of southern Burma.

Reported cases of sexual violence against children are rising across Burma. In February the Ministry of Home Affairs released crime statistics for 2017, showing a 27% increase on the previous year in the total number of recorded rapes, and a 33% increase in recorded child rapes. WCRP's research reveals several factors underlying the violence, including a lack of sex and gender education, poverty, and the impunity for perpetrators caused by inadequate legislation.

As well as documenting the incidents, WCRP documented the obstacles which families face when seeking justice for their children. In over half of the cases which WCRP documented, the family first reported the crime to village administrators. Village-level justice is flawed as it often involves arbitration and compensation rather than prosecution of the perpetrator. Families who chose to take the case to the police faced problems too. Burma continues to use archaic legislation dating back to 1861 when prosecuting gender-based violence. In addition, families described corruption in the judicial system. A lack of legal knowledge, and a lack of access to legal aid, compounded most families' problems. WCRP confirmed these findings in interviews with members of civil society who are working to improve survivors' access to justice.

The Burmese government must reform current legislation to combat this worrying trend. Burma's domestic legislation concerning gender-based violence is antiquated and inadequate, as it lacks specific provisions for sexual violence against children. All the cases in this report which were brought to trial used the 1861 Penal Code. As a priority, legislators must pass the Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Bill, which has been stalled in the *Pyithu Hluttaw* since 2013. In addition, HURFOM recommends that the Burmese government eliminate corruption in police and judicial systems, educate all parties involved in judicial processes on sexual violence and gender equality, and provide sex and gender equality education in order to eliminate harmful beliefs surrounding sexual violence.

“Since we released our previous report on sexual violence against children - “Cracks in the Silence” - in March 2017, sexual violence towards children in Mon State and Mon areas of southern Burma has continued. Since then we have documented 14 more cases of sexual violence against children. But all these cases are only what was collected by HURFOM, and there may have been many more cases which were not reported to us. As I see it, the number of cases of sexual violence towards children in Burma has increased, as we can see both in our report and on social media. I think the perpetrators do not respect the law in Burma; they believe that they can pay money to finish the cases. The government should take more action and respond quickly to solve the problem of sexual violence toward children. They should not release on bail perpetrators in child abuse cases. Moreover, the government must raise the punishment for perpetrators in order to protect children from sexual abuse.”

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