

## **Speech at the 68<sup>th</sup> Karen Martyrs' Day Ceremony**

**Old Mae Tao Clinic, Mae Sot, Thailand**

**12 August 2018**

### ***Karen soldiers are not the only Karen martyrs***

So what is a “martyr”? In my view, a “martyr” is a freedom fighter who has given up their life for the sake of others. All of you here today are Christians. Even though I am a Buddhist, I know about your most important martyr – Jesus. He was a freedom fighter who fought to free people from sin. He then became a martyr when he died for the sins of the world including those of the Karen people and of you. So He is also a Karen martyr.

The Burma Government does not want the Karen to celebrate Karen Martyrs' Day. Instead they want the Karen to celebrate their Martyr's Day each July. This day is to commemorate the assassination of Bamar General Aung San and eight other men on 19 July 1947. But were these men freedom fighters for the Karen people? Did they sacrifice their lives for the Karen people? I say “No”! Instead they collaborated with the Japanese army which killed thousands of Karen people when they came into Karen areas from Thailand. Aung San's Burma Independence Army soldiers also killed Karen people – men, women, and children - during this time. So why then should the Karen commemorate the Burma Martyrs' Day?

Over the past seventy years, other Karen freedom fighters, who were not Karen soldiers, also gave up their lives for the Karen people and are Karen martyrs.

Over the past seventy years, the Burma Government and military have wanted the Karen people to be sick and weak. Karen health workers were freedom fighters because they helped the Karen to stay healthy. Many were killed by the Burma military and gave up their lives doing this for the Karen people. They are Karen martyrs and should be honored today.

Over the past seventy years, the Burma Government and military have wanted the Karen people not to be educated or speak the Karen language. Karen health teachers were freedom fighters because they helped the Karen to become educated and speak the Karen language. Many were killed by the Burma military and gave up their lives doing this for the Karen people. They are Karen martyrs and should be honored today.

Over the past seventy years, the Burma Government and military have wanted the Karen people to not practice the Christian religion, but become Buddhist. Karen pastors were freedom fighters because they helped the Karen to live religious lives. Many were killed by the Burma military and gave up their lives doing this for the Karen people. They are Karen martyrs and should be honored today.

Over the past seventy years, the Burma military have come into Karen villagers to kill, rape, and steal. Karen village leaders were freedom fighters because they tried to protect the Karen villagers from this. Many were killed by the Burma military and gave up their lives doing this for the Karen people. They are Karen martyrs and should be honored today.

Over the past seventy years, the Burma Government and military wanted the Karen people to not be equal to the Bamar people. Karen political leaders were freedom fighters at the peace negotiation tables to make the Karen people equal to the Bamar people. Many were killed by the Burma military and gave up their lives doing this for the Karen people. They are Karen martyrs and should be honored today.

So Karen Martyr's Day to me is not only about Karen soldiers who gave up their lives for the Karen people, but it is also for the health workers, teachers, pastors, village heads, and political leaders who were freedom fighters for the Karen people and were killed by the Burma military and gave up their lives for the Karen people. They are also Karen martyrs and should be honored today. Many of them were also your great grandparents, grandparents, and parents who were freedom fighters and died as martyrs for you.

Over the past seventy years, there have been thousands of Karen martyrs. When will we stop adding to the list of Karen martyrs? It will only be when the Karen people achieve their political aspirations either through victory at the peace table or victory on the battlefield.

But now it is over seventy years and no victory, only more Karen martyrs. To achieve Karen political aspirations either at the peace table or on the battlefield, and have no more Karen martyrs, the Karens need good leaders. I ask you whether you think that you have those good political and military leaders to achieve Karen political aspirations either at the peace table or on the battlefield, and no more Karen martyrs. If you do not, then you need to get new Karen political and military leaders so there are no more Karen martyrs. It is in your hands now and if you do nothing, there will be no victory for the Karen people, only more Karen suffering and more Karen martyrs for us to commemorate on 12 August next year and each year in the future. Is this what you want?