



October 19, 2014

**Joint Statement of Karen Women's Groups
in support of the Reunification of the Kawthoolei Armed Forces (KAF)**

The Karen Women's Organization (KWO), Karen Women's Empowerment Group (KWEG) and Karen Women's Union (KWU) welcome the announcement, on October 13th, 2014, of the Karen armed resistance groups coming together under the name of "Kawthoolei Armed Forces (KAF)". The alliance of 4 Karen armed forces meets the long held desire of Karen people everywhere, especially of Karen women. We believe this is an opportunity for both peace building, and improved co-operation which can help reduce violence against women.

"The KAF was originally formed on July 5, 1949. At that time the KAF combined different Karen armed groups but over the years the alliance has split up. We are pleased to see that the Karen armed groups have reunified under the KAF and hope it will increase cooperation and understanding. We believe this unity will help to bring the genuine peace we all seek." said Nan Dah Eh Kler, KWO Chairperson.

Our community has been hoping for the reunification of different Karen armed groups for a long time. "We, the Karen people are not afraid of unity among the armed groups. Rather, we are afraid of splits and disunity which have a serious impact on the daily lives of local people. I am both encouraged by and fully support the unification of Karen organizations by the forming of KAF. This is right time to show our unity." said Naw Ohn Hla from the Karen Women's Union (KWU).

The 4 Karen armed forces who are now members of the KAF are the KNLA, KNDO, DKBA, and KNU/KNLA-PC.

Karen Women's Groups support the reunification of the KAF and we would like to see further action taken by the newly unified KAF. We wish to recommend:

- that the KAF, as a group, works to **seek political solutions** through dialogue and the support of the KNU and political bodies of other armed groups, while negotiating for peace with the Government of Burma.
- that the KAF develop and enforce a **military code of conduct** for its members to abide by, with the aim of containing the escalation of confrontations with the Tatmadaw.
- that the KAF **avoid any practices which infringe on the human rights** of civilians and work actively to respect, protect and promote human rights, rule of law and civilian security.

- that the members and officers of KAF **refrain from personal involvement in corrupt business activities** and abuse of power.
- that all members of KAF sign, as the KNU has done already, the two Geneva Call Deeds of Commitment, on the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict and the Prohibition of Sexual Violence.

“I never believe there is danger in unity. It is the lack of unity which can destroy our chances for sustainable peace in our country. This unification can help lead to more unity throughout the Karen community.” Susanna Hla Hla Soe, Director, Karen Women’s Empowerment Group (KWEG)

KWO is a community based organization formed in 1985 with the aim of empowerment of Karen women to be free from oppression, achieving equal status with men and to support the wellbeing of women and children. KWO has more than 45,000 members, including Karen women from refugee camps in Thailand and Karen State. We conduct a wide range of leadership development, advocacy, and provide services to women and children on both sides of the border.

KWEG was formed in March 8, 2003 with the purpose of bringing a brighter future to women and children. KWEG engages with facilitating training to build women’s capacity, a micro-finance program for families, women’s protection and empowerment programs and educational support of poor children and emergency assistance victims of disaster. Moreover, KWEG does advocacy for women rights, protection, and women’s participation in peace building.

KWU was formed in April 2014 with the purpose of supporting and shaping democracy and human rights in Burma. KWU works to promote Karen culture, literature and to encourage peace building and reconciliation in the country.

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