

New report by Kachin Women's Association Thailand: Burmese military strategies fuelling Kachin drug crisis

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A new report exposes how anti-insurgency strategies of the Burma Army are fuelling the drug crisis in Kachin areas, particularly since the renewal of conflict against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in 2011.

“Silent Offensive” by the Kachin Women’s Association Thailand (KWAT) reveals how the Burma Army is allowing its local militia to grow opium and produce heroin and other drugs in exchange for fighting against the KIA. As Burmese troops and their allies have progressively seized control of KIA areas, drug production has been increasing.

The main opium growing areas in Kachin State are now in Chipwi and Waingmaw townships, under the control of the Burma Army and its local Border Guard Forces led by Zakhung Ting Ying, a National Assembly MP. In northern Shan State, opium is booming in areas under the Burma Army and thirteen government militia forces, four of whose leaders are MPs in the Shan State Assembly.

Opium, heroin and methamphetamines are flooding from these government-controlled areas into Kachin communities, worsening existing problems of drug abuse, particularly among youth. It is estimated that about one third of students in Myitkyina and Bhamo universities are injecting drug users.

The report details the harrowing impacts of the drug crisis on women, who struggle to support their families while husbands and sons sell off household property and steal to feed their addiction. Frustrated with the authorities’ lack of political will to deal with the drug problem, women are taking a lead among local communities in setting up their own programs to combat drugs.

KWAT critiques UNODC and other international donors for not focusing on the role of the war, and particularly the anti-insurgency policies of the government, in fuelling the drug problem in Burma. KWAT urges all stakeholders to focus on finding a just political settlement to the conflict as an urgent priority in tackling the drug crisis.

“The future of the Kachin people is at stake. We need urgent action to tackle the drug problem before it’s too late,” said Shirley Seng of KWAT.

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Kachin Women’s Association Thailand (KWAT) is a non profit-making organisation working on behalf of Kachin women. We have a vision of a Kachin State where all forms of discrimination are eliminated; where all women are empowered to participate in decision making at a local, national and international level; and where all Kachin children have the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

