



## **Summary of Human Rights Violations in Karen State: January to June 2015**

**By KWO  
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The Karen Women's Organization ("KWO") collected information regarding continuing serious human rights abuses perpetrated by the Burma Army in all seven districts in Karen State from January to June 2015. Our data demonstrates that the Burma Army has taken advantage of the preliminary ceasefire to continue to commit serious human rights abuses, perpetrate direct attacks on civilians and expand its presence in Karen State. These deliberate human rights violations run the gamut from the use of banned land mines, unprovoked air strikes, indiscriminate civilian attacks causing death and grievous injury, appropriation of property and forced labor. Over this time period, KWO found that the Burma Army mobilized more troops in the area, reinforced its military compounds and increased persecution of local villagers.

### **No Access to Justice for Villagers**

These human rights abuses continue to be committed against civilians with complete impunity, with no means to access justice and punish perpetrators for villagers. In fact, the Burma government, despite its official rhetoric, continues to punish those who peacefully protest against human rights abuses. One such victim is Naw Ohn Hla who has been repeatedly sentenced under the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, and faces additional charges in three more districts, for her peaceful protests against government abuses and undemocratic policies, such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's years of house arrest. The Burma Army continues to commit heinous crimes because it is clear that there is no avenue for justice available to local residents.

The impact of these continuing human rights abuses on local villagers cannot be overstated. Villagers legitimately fear for their lives and safety from these serious and indiscriminate attacks. It is clear, therefore, that the preliminary ceasefire has not reduced the militarization of local areas in Karen State. On the contrary, the Burma Army has used the preliminary ceasefire and their official rhetoric regarding respect for citizens' rights as a smokescreen to hide continued human rights abuses throughout Karen State and impunity for perpetrators.

### **Detailed Summary of Attacks**

The violent and indiscriminate attacks from January to June 2015 include shooting civilians, laying land mines, resulting at times in serious injury and death. KWO received detailed reports about these indiscriminate attacks and human rights violations from both Mutraw and Taw Oo, with the situation in Mutraw being particularly grave. In Taw Oo district the Burma Army forcibly recruited soldiers, forced villagers to work for them and dropped artillery shells from military aircraft flying over civilian areas. In Mutraw, KWO received reports that the local battalions shot and killed villagers and practiced shooting large artillery near villages. Villagers

who got arrested by the BA soldiers were tortured; they were kicked, strangled, beaten with a gun and had hot water poured into their mouths. The Burma Army has repeatedly arrested, abused and shot at villagers in Mutraw but across all districts, arbitrary arrests of villagers have continued.

Moreover, the Burma Army has infringed on the basic human rights of villagers to freedom of movement and expression. The Burma Army has unilaterally instituted curfews, prohibiting villagers from travelling freely. The laying of new landmines, which result in indiscriminate death or injury, restricts villagers' ability to travel. Heavy restrictions and prohibitions have been placed on activities of community-based organizations operating in that area, with threats of violence for non-compliance. These threats have been made directly to village heads.

Despite official commitments to eliminate the use of forced labour, our data indicates that at the local level the practice continues unabated. Villagers have been forced, by threats of violence (including shooting of guns), to join the Burma Army, build military camps and serve as porters and labourers for the Burma Army. This directly contradicts the Burma government's national action plan to end forced labour by 2015 and contravenes legislation making forced labour a crime, with penalties for breaches, under the Penal Code.

The Burma Army has also deliberately destroyed and expropriated property, including by looting villagers' domestic property and livestock. In one instance, 60 homes were destroyed without provocation, leaving scores of villagers homeless. The Burma Army soldiers have confiscated villagers' land to build temples and stupas, using religion for political and military purposes.

These violations continue against the backdrop of a troubling increase in the presence of the Burma Army in Karen State. Military facilities are being built, enhanced and made more permanent, often through the use of forced village labor and expropriated materials. The Burma Army is also increasing in terms of absolute numbers, with more personnel being assigned to the area.