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**Statement by the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)**

**President Thein Sein must be challenged for failure to seek justice in Kawng Hka rape-murder case**

As President Thein Sein takes the spotlight at the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement this week, KWAT urges that he be challenged for his failure to seek justice in the case of the rape-murder of the two Kachin teachers last January.

The facts of this heinous crime are well-known. The two volunteer teachers were found raped and murdered in Kawng Hka village, northern Shan State, early on January 20, with strong evidence pointing to Burma Army soldiers as the culprits. However, military officials have refused to cooperate with police investigators, and to this day no one has been charged.

Less known is President Thein Sein's failure to respond to direct appeals for help from the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), for whom the teachers were working.

On January 23, the KBC first wrote to the President asking for the perpetrators to be arrested and punished according to the law. After seeing no progress in the case, the KBC wrote again on February 28, informing him they had set up a 17-member "Truth Seeking Committee," comprising legal experts, to carry out their own investigation.

On July 2, after consultation with Kachin women's organizations and legal advisors, the KBC wrote a third letter to the President, complaining that their investigation had been blocked, and requesting an official mandate for their committee. Specific requests were made for permission to investigate soldiers, access to police evidence, and guarantees of witness safety. However, the President did not respond, and till today the KBC has received no cooperation with their investigation.

The President's failure to intervene in this case is gravely irresponsible. People across Burma are waiting to see if the military perpetrators will be brought to justice. Yet, despite the high-profile nature of the case, the President is blatantly siding with the military, assuring them of impunity and giving them the green light to commit further heinous crimes.

"President Thein Sein's handling of the Kawng Hka case proves his absolute loyalty to the military and disregard for justice," said Seng Zin. "This casts a chill over the entire peace process."

The President's inaction also makes a mockery of the government's signing of the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict last year.

KWAT therefore urges all stakeholders in the peace process, including foreign diplomats, to challenge the President to take immediate action to seek justice in the Kawng Hka case.

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*Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) is a non-profit-making organization 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.*