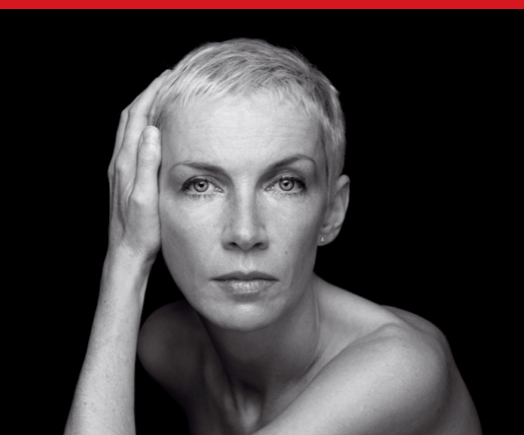


Standing with the women of Burma to end rape and sexual violence



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110 high profile women stand with the women of Burma to end rape and sexual violence

110 high profile women, including Dame Judi Dench, Annie Lennox, Jo Brand, Gillian Anderson, Imelda Staunton, Julie Walters and Zoë Wanamaker, are standing with the women of Burma to end rape and sexual violence. In the pledge the high profile women, who also include activists and politicians, have vowed to support:

- An investigation into rape and sexual violence by the Burmese military against ethnic women and girls.
- An end to impunity for rape and other forms of sexual violence in Burma.
- Support for victims.
- The inclusion of women at every political level in Burma including the peace negotiations between the Burmese government and the ethnic armed political groups.
- Burma's Rape Law to be in line with international human rights standards to outlaw rape in marriage.

Rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army

- The use of rape and sexual violence by Burma's armed forces is ongoing with impunity and reports of rape have increased over the last years.
- Although winning a landslide victory in national elections in November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, will not have control over the Burmese army when it takes office in April 2016. Therefore, there is a possibility that army rape will continue even with the new NLD-led government in place.
- The NLD has not yet published any report or made their policy on rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army clear.

Since Burma's independence in 1948 there has been ongoing conflict between the Burmese army and ethnic armed political groups. The Burmese army has used rape and sexual violence against women for decades as part of their warfare against ethnic minority groups in the country. This has been done with impunity and denial. With the new NLD-led government taking office in April 2016, there is the possibility of some of these issues being addressed, but not all. It is possible for the new government to initiate a domestic investigation into rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army, to make sure support for victims is available, to include women in peace negotiations and politics overall, as well as repealing laws such as Burma's rape law which discriminate women.

However, the conduct of the army will be outside government control since the new government will have no control over the military, and hence there is a possibility that army rape continues. This is because under the Burmese constitution, the army is not under the control of the government. The army could also prove uncooperative with a possible investigation into rape and sexual violence. The international community needs to support the NLD-led government if it takes any action on this issue, and pressure it if it doesn't.

Military rape in Burma – a background

UN reports have described rape and sexual violence as "widespread and systematic" and as a prevalent pattern of human rights violations in Burma. Cases of women and girls being raped by soldiers from the government's forces include the rape of a 12 year old girl in front of her mother, and of a disabled woman. Many of the victims were gang-raped, and many killed afterwards. This is in breach of international law, and constitutes a war crime.

Gang-raped in a church

Ngwa Mi, a 48 year old grandmother with 12 children, was sheltering alone in a church near the Kachin-China border town of Pang Wa in May 2012. Burmese army soldiers found her and about 10 troops beat her with rifle butts, stabbed her with knives, stripped her naked and gang-raped her over a period of three days in the church. Another villager, a man who had stayed behind to care for his paralyzed wife, had been captured and brought to the church, and was tortured and forced to watch. After being taken to hospital, Ngwa Mi has been reunited with her family, but has become mentally unstable.



Rape cases have increased dramatically in Shan and Kachin states in North Eastern Burma since the Burmese army broke ceasefire agreements in March and June 2011 respectively. Between March and October 2011 alone, the Women's League of Burma, an umbrella organisation of many ethnic women's groups in Burma, has reported 81 cases of rape in Shan and Kachin states. Due to the difficulties in documenting these violations, the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher.

The rape and murder of two Kachin teachers

Two female Kachin teachers, Maran Lu Ra (20 years old) and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin (21 years old) from the Kachin Baptist Convention, were brutally raped and killed by the Burmese Army in January 2015. The attack took place in Kaunghka village, Northern Shan State. This area had been facing increased conflict since 2011, when the Burmese Army broke a 17-year-old ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army. No one has yet been charged or put on trial for the crime.



Maran Lu Ra (20 ning)



*Shy Tangbau Hkawn
Nan Tsin (21 ning)*

Denial

The previous military dictatorships as well as the military-backed government between 2010-2015 in Burma repeatedly dismissed reports by women's organisations on rape and sexual violence as black propaganda. This politics of denial continued under President Thein Sein, who was hailed internationally as a reformer, who said in October 2012: "Our military is very disciplined, there is no reason for the military to commit acts of rape or murder". On the rare occasions the Burmese army has admitted that rape has taken place, it is always claimed that these are one-off incidents.

Lack of women's involvement in peace negotiations

Armed conflict has been ongoing in Burma since independence. In 2011 peace negotiations were initiated between the Burmese government and ethnic armed groups. The sincerity from the government's side in these negotiations has been questioned but in October 2015 the government signed a ceasefire agreement with eight out of around twenty ethnic armed groups. But women have been largely missing from the negotiations and many ethnic minority women's groups are now pointing to the lack of inclusion of gender-related issues in the agreements, including rape and sexual violence in conflict.

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI)

In 2012, the then UK Foreign Secretary William Hague announced the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) as a new measure to stop the use of rape and sexual violence in conflict, support victims and tackle impunity. The British government did not initially include Burma in the PSVI as one of the focus countries, until coming under pressure from NGOs and the UK Parliament to do so. Although Burma then was included, there has been no specific support for victims of army rape by the British government. The new NLD-led government should be provided support by the PSVI to tackle rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army.

As part of the PSVI, many countries around the world signed up to a declaration to end rape and sexual violence in conflict. The declaration contains practical and political commitments to end impunity, promote accountability, and provide justice and safety for victims of sexual violence in conflict. In 2014 the government of Burma finally signed the declaration but has since then taken no steps to implement it.

Time to act

Women's groups in Burma have long been highlighting the use of rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army against ethnic minority women. While there now is a possibility of a domestic investigation into this under the new NLD-led government, if the Burmese army proves uncooperative and rape and sexual violence continues, the international community must consider an international investigation to address these crimes. The international community should also offer proper support to survivors, and to support women in peace negotiations and the inclusion of women at every political level in Burma.

The 110 women supporting the pledge:

Angela Smith MP, Labour MP
Anna Roberts, Burma Campaign UK
Annie Lennox OBE, Singer
Baroness Bakewell DBE, Labour Peer
Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville MBE, Liberal Democrat Peer
Baroness Berridge, Conservative Peer
Baroness Campbell of Surbiton, Crossbench Peer
Baroness Coussins, Crossbench Peer
Baroness Cox, Crossbench Peer
Baroness Deech DBE, Crossbench Peer
Baroness Finlay of Llandaff, Crossbench Peer
Baroness Flather DL, Crossbench Peer
Baroness Golding, Labour Peer
Baroness Goudie, Labour Peer
Baroness Gould of Potternewton, Labour Peer
Baroness Harris of Richmond DL, Liberal Democrat Peer
Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town, Labour Peer
Baroness Hilton of Eggardon QPM, Labour Peer
Baroness Hodgson of Abinger CBE, Conservative Peer
Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb, Green Party Peer
Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead, Labour Peer
Baroness Lister of Burtersett CBE, Labour Peer
Baroness Mallalieu QC, Labour Peer
Baroness Meacher, Crossbench Peer

Baroness Nye, Labour Peer
Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Liberal Democrat Peer
Baroness Stedman-Scott OBE DL, Conservative Peer
Baroness Thornton, Labour Peer
Baroness Uddin, Non-affiliated Peer
Baroness Warnock DBE, Crossbench Peer (retired June 2015)
Baroness Wheatcroft, Conservative Peer
Caroline Lucas MP, Green Party MP
Carolyn Harris MP, Labour MP
Charlotte Leslie MP, Conservative MP
Cheery Zahau, Chin activist
Chris Keates, NASUWT General Secretary
Cilla Black OBE*, Singer, TV-presenter
Dame Janet Suzman DBE, Actor
Dame Judi Dench CH, DBE, FRSA, Actor
Debbie Stothard, Altsean-Burma, The International Federation for Human Rights
Diane Abbott MP, Labour MP
Dr. Cynthia Maung, Mae Tao Clinic
Fern Britton, TV-presenter
Fiona Bruce MP, Conservative MP
Fiona O'Donnell, Former Labour MP
Frances O'Grady, Trade Union Congress, General Secretary
Gillian Anderson, Actor
Hannah Bardell MP, Scottish National Party MP
Heidi Alexander MP, Labour MP
Helen Goodman MP, Labour MP
Helen Hayes MP, Labour MP
Honor Blackman, Actor
Hseng Moon, Shan Women's Action Network
Imelda Staunton CBE, Actor
Jessica N-Hkum, Kachin Women's Association Thailand
Jo Brand, Comedian
Jody Williams, Nobel Women's Initiative - Received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997
Julia Marip, Women's League of Burma
Julie Walters CBE, Actor
Karin Valtersson, Burma Campaign UK
Kate Hollern MP, Labour MP
Kerry McCarthy MP, Labour MP
Khin Ohmar, Burma Partnership
Khon Ja, Kachin Peace Network
Lorraine Kelly OBE, TV-presenter
Margaret Ritchie MP, Social Democratic & Labour Party MP
Margot James MP, Conservative MP
Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Actor
Marie Rimmer MP, Labour MP
Mary Creagh MP, Labour MP
Maureen Lipman CBE, Actor
Maw Moe Bu, Karenni activist
May Sabe Phyu, Kachin Peace Network
Meg Hillier MP, Labour (Co-op) MP
Moon Nay Li, Kachin Women's Association Thailand

Naomi Long, Former Alliance MP
Naw K'Nyaw Paw, Karen Women's Organisation
Naw Wah Ku Shee, Karen Women's Organisation
Nicky Gavron AM, Labour London Assembly Member
Rachael Maskell MP, Labour (Co-op) MP
Ronni Ancona, Actor
Rosalinn Zahau, Chin Human Rights Organisation
Rt Hon Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top, Labour Peer
Rt Hon Baroness Blackstone, Labour Peer
Rt Hon Baroness Corston, Labour Peer
Rt Hon Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde, Labour Peer
Rt Hon Baroness Hughes of Stretford, Labour Peer
Rt Hon Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke, Labour Peer
Rt Hon Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, Labour Peer
Rt Hon Caroline A Spelman MP, Conservative MP
Rt Hon Dame Joan Ruddock, Former Labour MP
Rushanara Ali MP, Labour MP
Sandra Osborne, Former Labour MP
Sappho Dias, Burma Justice Committee
Sarah Champion MP, Labour MP
Sarah Parish, Actor
Sharon Hodgson MP, Labour MP
Sheila Reid, Actor
Soe Soe Nwe, Women's League of Burma
Susanna Hla Hla Soe, Karen Women Empowerment Group
Tin Tin Nyo, Burmese Women's Union
Val McDermid, Author
Valerie Vaz MP, Labour MP
Vera Baird QC, Police and Crime Commissioner - Northumbria
Victoria Roberts, Chair, Burma Campaign UK
Victoria Wood CBE, Comedian
Virginia McKenna OBE, Actor
Wai Hnin Pwint Thon, Burma Campaign UK
Yasmin Qureshi MP, Labour MP
Yoko Ono, Artist
Zoë Wanamaker CBE, Actor
Zoya Phan, Burma Campaign UK

*Signed the petition before she died in August 2015



Time to End Rape and Sexual Violence in Burma

I am standing with the women of Burma

I pledge my support to the women of Burma in their struggle to end rape and sexual violence.

Rape has been used as a weapon of war by successive dictatorships for decades. Soldiers enjoy complete impunity. For many ethnic women, rape and sexual violence remain a continuing threat to their security.

Since Thein Sein became President in 2011, reports of rape and sexual violence perpetrated by the military have increased. Many of the victims were gang-raped, and many killed afterwards. This is in breach of international law, which constitutes a war crime. Despite signing the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, the government of Burma has taken no steps to implement it.

I support the following demands made by the women of Burma:

- An international investigation into rape and sexual violence by the Burmese military against ethnic women and girls.
- An end to impunity for rape and other forms of sexual violence in Burma.
- Amendment of the 2008 Constitution that guarantees impunity for military perpetrators, so further sexual violence can be prevented.
- The inclusion of women in the peace negotiations between the Burmese government and the ethnic armed political groups, where the issue of rape and sexual violence in conflict is properly addressed.
- The inclusion of women at every political level in Burma.
- Burma's Rape Law to be in line with international human rights standards to outlaw rape in marriage.
- The British government should provide funding for the Women's League of Burma and its members to support their work in documenting cases of rape and providing support for victims of sexual violence.

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Address :

Postcode:

Email: