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WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA: Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Clinton

November 25, 2011

The Honorable
Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

By Mail: to above address
By Fax: (202) 456 2461 , (202) 647 6738

BURMA: Demand an End to Sexual Violence Against Women

Dear Madam Secretary,

Thank you for your ongoing support to the women of Burma and for women's rights worldwide. We urge you on your upcoming trip to Burma to expressly demand an immediate end to the use of rape as a weapon of war against the ethnic women of Burma. The Burmese Army's widespread attacks against ethnic civilian communities, especially against women, is an egregious violation of international law and blatantly shows the lack of the rule of law in Burma. We know that you understand the security of women is not a minor issue, but a major problem that has to be addressed before a nation can progress.

Crimes against humanity, especially sexual violence, forced labor, forced relocation, and torture have increased this year as old ceasefires have deteriorated and the Burmese Army has stepped up attacks against the Kachin, Shan, Karen and other ethnic nationalities. The Women's League of Burma and our member organizations have documented [81] rape cases since March of this year when Thein Sein took the presidency in Burma and among them 36 women were killed. Human rights abuses in Burma are prevalent because of the culture of impunity put in place at the highest levels of government. The Burmese regime continuously fails to investigate human rights abuses committed by its military and instead categorically denies the possibility that abuses are taking place.

One of our member organizations, the Kachin Women's Association of Thailand documented this case of sexual violence and it highlights the insecurity the women of Burma face. On the evening of 9 August soldiers from Burmese Army Battalion 37 entered the home of a family living on the edge of Bum Tawng village near where their battalion was stationed. The troops gang raped and then killed Ma Kaw, a 39-year-old woman from the Kachin ethnic group along with Ma Lu, her 17 year old daughter. In the same incident the soldiers also tortured and then shot and killed Ma Lu's father. This horrific case and the circumstances surrounding it are repeatedly frequently in Burma.

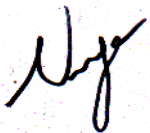
The widespread nature of the rape cases, along with the flagrant brutality of these incidents of sexual violence, in full view of other troops, demonstrates that the Burmese Army views rape as an important tactic in its ongoing military campaigns to subjugate Burma's ethnic groups. Burmese governments authorities cannot claim to be on the road to reform until attacks against civilians are immediately halted and those responsible are held accountable.

As your trip only includes Rangoon and Naypyidaw in central Burma and not regions in which ethnic minority women and representatives live, we urge you before and during your trip to meet with women leaders, especially representatives from ethnic nationalities.

The Kachin Women's Association released a report in September that chronicled the use of rape against that ethnic group documenting scores of cases—in many instances women were raped then murdered. We stand ready to provide more information and documentation for you and your staff regarding ongoing crimes against humanity in Burma before your trip on December 1.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tin Tin Nyo', is positioned above the typed name.

Tin Tin Nyo
General Secretary
Women's League of Burma