



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Statement: UPR Info Pre-session on Myanmar, December 2020

Your Excellencies,

Five years have passed since the last UPR and the government's commitment to ending impunity. Yet, it has taken no steps to hold the military accountable for the past human rights violations committed in Southeast Myanmar, denying countless victims access to justice. Current abuses by government troops, including sporadic instances of killing and torture, are often met with impunity. This has led to distrust towards the justice system among Karen villagers, who see it as corrupted and biased. We call on the government to undertake comprehensive judicial reforms and adopt strategies to end impunity for past and present human rights violations.

Similarly, no progress was made in addressing land grabbing. The security forces and private companies still use confiscated lands, and confiscations continue, fuelled by the predominance of customary tenure in ethnic areas. In September 2018, customary owners of land classified as vacant, fallow or virgin were given six months to apply for land permits. Many lack legal knowledge, Burmese language skills or access to administration services, and thus did not apply. They could now be charged with trespassing and lose their lands – as many already did. The government must effectively recognise and protect customary tenure without delay.

In 2015, Myanmar accepted to enact legislation on violence against women. Although a bill has been in development since 2013, the process has stalled and civil society pointed out that the draft falls short of international standards. In rural Southeast Myanmar, most female survivors of sexual violence do not receive any support and protection. Most cases end up being dealt with by male-dominant village authorities and settled through compensation. A dedicated and comprehensive law would only be the first of many steps needed to tackle violence against women. Yet, the government has consistently failed to take that step.

The Myanmar government laid out provisions in its COVID-19 response plans for health infrastructure expansion and cash and food assistance to vulnerable and at-risk populations, for which it has received funding from the World Bank and IMF. In the actual implementation of these plans, only villagers living in government-controlled areas have received assistance. Despite the government's promise of "a coordinated whole-of-nation response [...] leaving no-one behind," up to three hundred fifty thousand people in Southeast Myanmar alone have been left out, and currently face food shortages and poor access to healthcare. We request detailed plans of how the government will address this exclusion.

Thank you.

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