

## VOICES OF THE PEOPLE

### VOICES FROM THE GROUND

- ▶ On Nov 11, between 600 to 700 Karen people from 22 different states across the U.S. took part in their first ever demonstration in front of the White House as well as the Burma Embassy, demanding the U.S. Government to put pressure on the Burma Government towards implementing genuine peace and reconciliation in the country, and retain sanctions against military cronies. [Read BL's interview with the leading organiser.](#)
- ▶ CSOs and locals launched a campaign on Nov 3 calling for the complete shutdown of the Tigyt coal-fired power plant in southern Shan State following a test-run of the plant after two years of closure.
- ▶ About 300 farmers in Sagaing Region protested a longstanding feud with a Chinese-backed nickel-processing plant on Nov 10, claiming that the factory confiscated their lands without proper compensation.
- ▶ On Nov 27, over 1,500 farmers from 19 townships gathered on the banks of the Namtu river to demand an immediate cancellation of the Upper Yeywa dam in northern Shan State, where conflict has escalated dramatically last month.

### Why we uphold the voices of the people of Burma?

In order for Burma to transform to a peaceful and democratic society based on freedom and justice, the voices of the people must be heard in the process. Democracy is all about people's voices, and the best way to measure the extent of reforms and progress is to listen to the people, particularly the vulnerable ethnic communities in Burma's border areas. Having access to people's voices and stories fosters greater understanding and knowledge about the past and the present as well as the similarities and differences between Burma's peoples. Sharing information and stories with both local and global communities can promote positive developments and effective action, accountability and justice as well as forgiveness and reconciliation. Storytelling can also be a healing and empowering activity that can help the people of Burma discover themselves and create a shared vision for the future.

### Update and Voices from Karen Community Amidst Conflict and Uncertain Political Process: General Nerdah Mya and Villagers Speak



Important events affecting the Karen political destiny and the peace process have taken place recently. The conflict between the Burma Army and its proxy BGF (Border Guard Force) and a splinter group of the DKBA [that took back the old name Democratic Karen Buddhist Army] around Mae Ta War area on the Thailand-Burma border displaced around 5,000 Karen civilians between August and October, threatening to derail the peace process and raising alarm bells for the Karen NCA ('Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement) signatory groups KNU (Karen National Union) and the DKBA (Democratic Karen Benevolent Army). Another event shocking many Karen and other actors was the postponement of the KNU Congress that was scheduled to be held this month [November] and would have included electing a new leadership, an event anticipated by many local and international observers who have openly disagreed with many of the decisions made by the current leadership, headed by Saw Mutu Say Poe, described them as being driven by self-interest. Burma Link interviewed Major General Nerdah Bo Mya, the head of the KNDO (Karen National Defence Organisation – under the KNU), as well as a school teacher and students residing in a village near Mae Ta War and under the protection of the KNDO to hear their views about the recent events.

[Read full story on Burma Link's website](#)

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## BURMA LINK NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2016

[www.burmalink.org](http://www.burmalink.org)

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Burma Link advocates for Burma's ethnic nationalities and displaced people, and shares their voices and stories locally and internationally.

### Quick Facts about Burma and the Border DID YOU KNOW?

#### About Burma:

- ▶ The Burma army has **deliberately targeted civilian populations** in an effort to defeat ethnic opposition armies. Burma army operations have been described as **genocide of ethnic peoples**.
- ▶ **Three million people** have fled Burma and more than **600,000** remain internally displaced. Most of them belong to ethnic nationality groups.
- ▶ Grave **violations of humanitarian law** continue in Burma's prisons and ethnic areas. Perpetrators largely go unpunished and victims remain **unable to seek redress**.
- ▶ War continues in Shan and Kachin States where Burma army has shelled villages, carried out **aerial attacks** and **displaced at least 120,000** ethnic people, including Shan, Kachin, Kokang, Ta'ang (Palaung) and Lahu.

#### About Thailand-Burma border:

- ▶ Thailand hosts more than **100,000 refugees** in nine camps on the Thailand-Burma border. The real number of refugees is **at least double**.
- ▶ Whilst conflict and rights abuse continues in Burma's ethnic areas including the Karen State where most refugees originate from, **plans for repatriating** the refugees are under way. The first organised return of 65 refugee camp residents took place on Oct 25.
- ▶ Donors have cut funding for refugees leading to **cuts in food rations** and **service provision** such as health and education. Many refugees feel pushed out of the camps before they feel ready to leave.
- ▶ As donors have shifted their funds towards the central Burma Government system, ethnic organisations and service providers have also suffered funding cuts and populations such as IDPs in ethnic border areas continue to receive less aid.

### Featured Story

#### 'It Is Very Important that We Are All United': Naw K'Nyaw Paw, Secretary of the Karen Women Organisation



In this video interview, the Secretary of the Karen Women Organisation (KWO), Naw K'Nyaw Paw, discusses the 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and the need for unity in Burma. She discusses the silence of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the duplicity of the international community about human rights. Naw K'Nyaw Paw concludes with a message to the Karen people.

"I think the peace process is a kind of a show of the Burmese government to get international community support."

"This government and the Burma Army has divided us and we have to learn our lesson. We need to be united with the other ethnic armed organisations. [...] We must not be silent. We have to speak out for our people and also we should not allow ourselves to be divided among our ethnic groups. It is very important that we are all united and then fight toward federalism and establishing self-determination within our ethnic areas."

[Read full story on Burma Link's website](#)

### In this newsletter

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## VOICES OF THE PEOPLE

### 'We Are All Accountable for Our Country': Mu Kapaw, Organiser of November 11 Karen Demonstration at the U.S. White House



On November 11th, Karen people residing in the United States are organising their first ever demonstration in front of the White House, aiming to bring the struggle of the Karen and Burma's other ethnic nationalities to the attention of the U.S. Government and observers around the world. Burma Link interviewed Mu Kapaw, leading organiser of the demonstration, to learn more about this historic event marking the 'first step' towards reaching the long overdue goals of freedom, peace and justice for Burma's Karen people and other ethnic populations who continue to suffer the effects of Burma Army militarisation and terrorisation in ethnic areas.

Mu Kapaw himself fled the Karen State over two decades ago, and now works to mobilise a bottom up movement of the Karen people in the U.S. and to encourage and inspire the Karen diaspora to step up, take responsibility for their own destiny, and raise their voices for freedom:

"What we are doing right now is for the people that are not able to speak, not able to stand up, not able to raise a voice, not able to write a word for freedom, for peace. This is how we ethnic people across the United States including Kachin, Shan, Karen, we should come together and do things for our country."

[Read full story on Burma Link's website](#)

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### REPORTS

**Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT):** A Far Cry From Peace: Ongoing Burma Army Offensives and Abuses in Northern Burma Under the NLD Government  
**Network for Human Rights Documentation Burma (ND-Burma):** Rape: The Burma Army's Unpunished Weapon Of War / Challenges to Repatriation  
**Human Rights Watch (HRW):** "The Farmer Becomes the Criminal": Land Confiscation in Burma's Karen State"  
**Women's League for Burma (WLB):** Access to Justice for Women Survivors of Gender-based violence committed by state actors in Burma

### DOCUMENTARY

**Karen News:** Our River..., Our Life...

## Conflict and Displacement Update

### CONFLICT UPDATE: Northern Burma

- ▶ Since August, BA has been attacking the Kachin's Gidon Mountain post, which allows the KIO access to IDP camps north the post. If the BA was able to capture Gidon, several IDP camps would be cut off from aid. BA transported more troops and equipment to the area in the beginning of Nov and daily exchange of artillery rounds were reported around the area.
- ▶ On Nov 20, the Northern Alliance (NA) of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) -- comprising of the KIO/KIA, PSLF/TNLA, AA, and MNDAA -- against the Burma Army (BA) in the area after enduring repeated and intensified attacks by the Burmese troops also against civilians. Read BL's interview with the PSLF/TNLA Head of Foreign Affairs.
- ▶ During the fighting on Nov 20, eight people, including police officers and soldiers, were reportedly killed in Muse. NA released a statement on Nov 21 demanding a halt traveling in the northern Shan State due to an intensification of hostilities.
- ▶ TNLA spokesman said the reason of the attack against the BA is to put pressure on the government to solve political problems. The KIA on Nov 23 released a statement claiming it was waging a "limited war" alongside their allies in response to BA offensives in ethnic areas across the country.
- ▶ More than 2,600 IDPs are staying at monasteries in Muse and about 3,000 others have fled to China where they are being provided with shelter and medical care, according to China's foreign ministry.
- ▶ NA soldiers seized most of Mong Ko, a border town in northern Shan State, but the BA took back control of the town after multiple air strikes running over several days.

### DISPLACEMENT: Northern and Eastern Burma

- ▶ Kachin IDPs said the new Kachin State Government has shown no interest in them and has never sent anyone to visit the village whereas the former government at least visited them every two or three months and gave them food supplies.
- ▶ Some 40,000 IDPs in Kachin and northern Shan states have been facing food shortages due to being unable to secure long-term food support and the government's block on food aid, according to local relief groups.
- ▶ People displaced from the Mae Tha Wor area of Karen State by fighting are still too scared to return home because of Burma Army's interrogation.
- ▶ CSOs have questioned the Thailand-Burma border refugee repatriation period since the violence throughout Burma has been increasing. The Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) also said they feel they were neglected in decision-making processes and were not invited to co-operate in recent refugee repatriation efforts by the UNHCR.

## Peace Process | Human Rights | Arakan State Update

### PEACE PROCESS

- ▶ Whilst DASSK has pushed EAOs to sign the non-inclusive NCA before the next UPC (Union Peace Conference), KIO leaders argue that they need political negotiations rather than to sign the NCA.
- ▶ A meeting between the Government's Peace Commission, the UNFC's Delegation for Political Negotiation (DPN), and the technical support committee was held on Nov 9. The talks concluded the meeting without reaching any agreements. The UNFC/DPN continue to push for an all-inclusive peace process.
- ▶ The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) said they will continue with the UNFC all-inclusiveness policy of not signing the NCA until all EAOs are included in the process.
- ▶ The Karen Youth Organisation (KYO) ran a short course at a 'Youth Empowered Society Camp' to train youths on how to effectively participate in the peace process.
- ▶ Ethnic people will not tolerate being cheated again, and they must see the signs of a true federal union before the NCA is signed, said Gen. Sao Hso Ten of the SSP-P/SSA.
- ▶ Breaches of the terms of the NCA by both the BA and the RCSS/SSA-S caused clashes in Oct, the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) has determined, following an investigative field trip to the affected area.
- ▶ The KNU has decided to postpone its 16th Congress from Nov 2016 till March 2017. The congress— which elects new members of the KNU's Central Standing Committee—takes place every four years and can have far-reaching consequences for the peace process if new leadership allies with other EAOs.



(UNFC - DPN Workshop in Chiang Mai)

### HUMAN RIGHTS

- ▶ A local jade hand picker was shot on Nov 12 by Burma Army soldiers in Hpakant, Kachin State, when the troops randomly fired into the hand pickers who were finding leftover jade pieces in the debris.
- ▶ Local residents in Kachin and northern Shan States have reported of several abuses and rights violations by BA soldiers in Oct, including torture, arbitrary detention and killings.

- ▶ During BA operations against the SSPP/SSA-N in Oct, locals reported extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests of villagers as well as looting of civilian property. Over 2,000 were newly displaced in Hsipaw after BA attack.
- ▶ A number of concerned CSOs have issued a statement demanding an investigation into the murder of a young Karen women activist, Naw Chit Pandaing, stabbed to death on Nov 19, in Dawei Town.
- ▶ Plans to build dams on the Salween River by the Burma Government, China and Thailand threatens millions of villagers and animals that depend on the river for their living, food sources and as a vital transport link.

Burmese authorities continue to arrest and charge individuals, including members of the ruling party, for criticizing the military and government, HRW said on Nov 27.

### ARAKAN STATE UPDATE

- ▶ Researchers from the International State Crime Initiative (ISCI) published the results of months of fieldwork in Arakan State, concluding that the policies of DASSK-led Government are genocidal.
- ▶ New satellite imagery of the state shows 820 newly identified structures destroyed in Rohingya villages between Nov 10-18, in addition to the 430 destroyed houses and buildings identified earlier by the Human Rights Watch (HRW). At a news conference on Nov 16, Burma's Office of the State Counsellor said that it acknowledged there had been buildings burned in the three villages, but disputed the total number based on images. DASSK faces mounting criticism for her Government's handling of the crisis
- ▶ The Burma government on Nov 16 formed a special information committee to release news about the situation in Arakan in an apparent move to counter damning reports by outside groups.
- ▶ Up to 30,000 people have been displaced by renewed violence in northern Arakan State, the UN said on Nov 18. The death toll from recent violence is believed to have reached 130.
- ▶ Kofi Annan issued a statement expressing his deep concern over the recent violence in northern Arakan State. A group of parliamentarians from member states of the ASEAN have also called on Burma's government to investigate alleged abuses in northern Arakan State.
- ▶ Myanmar Times journalist was dismissed after she covered the story of abuses and rape in Arakan State. Following this event, several international human rights groups have spoken out over what they allege is Burma Government obstruction and harassment of journalists trying to cover the crisis.
- ▶ Burma's plans to arm and train non-Muslim residents in north of Arakan State criticised by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ).