

For Immediate Release

UNITED NATIONS STAKEHOLDERS ALERTED OF CONTINUED USE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A WEAPON OF WAR IN BURMA'S ETHNIC AREAS

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[NEW YORK, NY] - Today, at a side-event to the Security Council's annual debate on conflict-related sexual violence, the United Nations was presented with a troubling account of continuing sexual violence committed by the military against ethnic women in Burma. On the eve of the April 25 debate, Ms. Naw K'nyaw Paw, Secretary of the Karen Women's Organization, presented compelling reports of heinous crimes committed by the military and called on the United Nations, international donors and governments to investigate these human rights violations, denounce the use of sexual violence in Burma and support women's groups on the ground who are attempting to combat this pervasive pattern of abuse.

Ms. Paw highlighted to the audience of international advocates and policy-makers that "sexual violence is a deeply neglected issue which is too often covered under a veil of silence in Burma in order to not 'threaten' any reforms or progress."

Co-hosted by the Nobel Women's Initiative, the Global Justice Center, Amnesty International and the NGO Working Group on Women Peace and Security, the meeting highlighted that despite the installation of a nominally-civilian government and tentative steps toward democracy, human rights abuses have continued unabated during the tenure of President Thein Sein. As a result, the ethnic women of Burma continue to suffer sexual violence at the hands of the military. These abuses will continue because President Sein lacks the legal capacity to stop these abuses since the Constitution establishes the military as a separate legal entity and grants complete immunity for its actions. "Without amending the Constitution to bring the military under the control of the civilian government, the women of Burma will continue to suffer," Janet Benshoof, President of the Global Justice Center stated.

Tomorrow, the Security Council will be presented with further evidence of ongoing sexual violence in Burma through UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report to the Council on conflict-related sexual violence. Evidence of ongoing sexual violence in Burma has been detailed in his last three annual reports to the Council, yet the international community has done little, if anything, to end these abuses by Burma's military.

International agencies and governments have thus far prioritized economic considerations in Burma, choosing to overlook troubling evidence of human rights abuses when determining foreign policy. Instead of ignoring these facts, the Security Council, donor states and all members of the international community should use them to hold the Burmese government accountable for the actions of the military and bring justice to the women of Burma.

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