



New Report on Sexual Violence in Burma: Military Impedes Justice for Survivors

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[RANGOON, CHIANG MAI]

A new report to be released Tuesday by the [Women's League of Burma \(WLB\)](#) reveals ongoing sexual violence by government forces against ethnic women in Burma, and presents troubling evidence of intimidation of those seeking justice for these crimes.

Covering the period between January and June 2014, the report “If they had hope, they would speak” details how widespread impunity for crimes of rape, gang rape and sexual assault committed by the military continues due to impunity provisions enshrined in the 2008 Constitution and the absence of the rule of law. The report calls for amending the 2008 Constitution, since sexual violence crimes are a “direct result of Burma’s Constitution situating the military above human rights and norms of international law.”

Janet Benshoof, President of the Global Justice Center, a New York-based legal think tank agrees: “No military perpetrator of heinous crimes including rape has ever been prosecuted for war crimes in Myanmar and the Constitution guarantees that none will ever be. Systemic rape of ethnic women is treated by the government as an acceptable military pastime rather than as a war crime in violation of international humanitarian law.”

WLB’s report expresses strong concerns on developments contributing to a culture of impunity, such as increased military presence in ethnic areas, intimidation of civil society organizations and the continued absence of women in peace negotiations.

“The military is sending a clear message that it is willing to use violence and coercion against those brave enough to speak out about human rights abuses,” says Tin Tin Nyo, General Secretary of the WLB.

Moreover, the report highlights the failure of the government to fulfill its public commitments to prosecute all perpetrators of sexual violence. According to WLB, the government signs onto international actions to successfully evade international pressure and calls for accountability. Most recently, the government of Burma signed the International Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, an initiative spearheaded by the United Kingdom.

“We are not fooled by meaningless actions like the signing of a declaration if it is not accompanied by concrete commitments to justice,” said Jody Williams, Nobel peace laureate and co-chair of the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict. “If Burma wants to show it is

serious about ending the rape of women, it will stop the use of rape as a weapon against ethnic women in Burma and put in place justice mechanisms to allow survivors real recourse for crimes committed against them.”

“The government of Burma has worked hard to show its reformist credentials to the world, but for women in Burma’s ethnic communities, human rights abuses and sexual violence at the hands of the Burma Army remain a constant threat,” states Tin Tin Nyo. “Any positive changes coming out of Naypyidaw have not improved the lived experience of women in Burma.”

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