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Australian Karen Organisation

ABN 43 759 263 249

Incorporated in Victoria

27 January 2021

The Hon Senator Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Level 3 North Wing
2-12 Macquarie Street
Parramatta
NSW 2150

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Australian Karen Organisation Inc. (AKO), I would like to draw your attention to the humanitarian crisis resulting from the escalated artillery attacks by the Burma Army in the Mutraw (Papun) and Kler Lwe Htoo (Nyaunglebin) Districts of Northern Karen State, which have displaced over 7,500 villagers and killed innocent Karen civilians from the period of early December 2020 to 12 January 2021.

According to the Karen National Union (KNU), the skirmish broke out after the Burmese Army troops entered the KNU's territory with a large number of forces under the pretence of road construction, The details of the Burmese Army battalion involved are unknown. The KNU is an ethnic armed organisation which had signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on 15 October 2015.

Since early December 2020, five Burma Army battalions have been firing shells around their bases in the Luthaw and Dweh Lo Townships of Mutraw (Territory of KNU Brigade 5), causing 3,176 villagers from 12 villages to flee and hide in the surrounding jungle. Many of these villagers were similarly displaced last year by the Burma Army shelling during a fierce offensive to push through a strategic road into Northern Mutraw.

On 11 January 2021, Burma Army IB 57 began shelling around the village of Ta Kaw Der, in the Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwe Htoo (Territory of KNU Brigade 3), west of Mutraw, displacing a further 588 villagers, and causing the closure of community schools in the area. This is the first displacement in this area since the start of the peace process in 2012.

On 12 January 2021 the Burma Army began artillery attacks in the Mutraw (Papun) and Kler Lwe Htoo (Nyaunglebin) Districts of Northern Karen State and have displaced over 3,700 villagers, and killed a village chief.

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Despite the efforts of the International Community to endorse genuine peace, the Burmese Military have increased their attacks on various ethnic groups, including the Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States, failing to uphold the ceasefire principles in the Karen State in particular.

We believe that Burma in its state of humanitarian crisis, ought be summoned by the United Nations Security Council to the International Criminal Court.

The Burmese Military's callous breach of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), including the moving of troops into the agreed ceasefire boundary, is to be condemned.

As the armed conflict continues between the Burma Army and the independent ethnic groups, such as the Karen National Liberation Front (KNLA), much needed humanitarian aid organisations are experiencing difficulty in accessing the conflict zones, and thus the internally displaced people, further denying them of basic rights to food, shelter and healthcare.

The civilians and displaced persons of the ethnic States of Burma have the right to return to their homes in safety and with dignity. This however cannot occur until genuine peace is achieved throughout Burma and the malicious military offensives within ethnic territories, such as the Mutraw District, Northern Karen State as recent within three weeks of Burmese Military attacks, have ceased.

We would like to request that you to call on the Burmese Government:

- 1) For the immediate withdrawal of Burmese Army troops from these new offensive positions and return of all troops to the established Burma Army bases to de-escalate the situation.
- 2) To abide by the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement which was signed by the Burmese Government and eight ethnic armed organisation including the Karen National Union, and to proceed until genuine peace and national reconciliation has been established.
- 3) To provide humanitarian aid to those crisis areas and for the aid to go through existing community based organisations serving the region, rather than through the Government or large international organisations based in Central Burma.

I would also like to request that you advocate for the bringing of genuine peace and national reconciliation by means of political and peace-building interventions between the Burmese Government and ethnic people of Burma.

Yours sincerely,

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