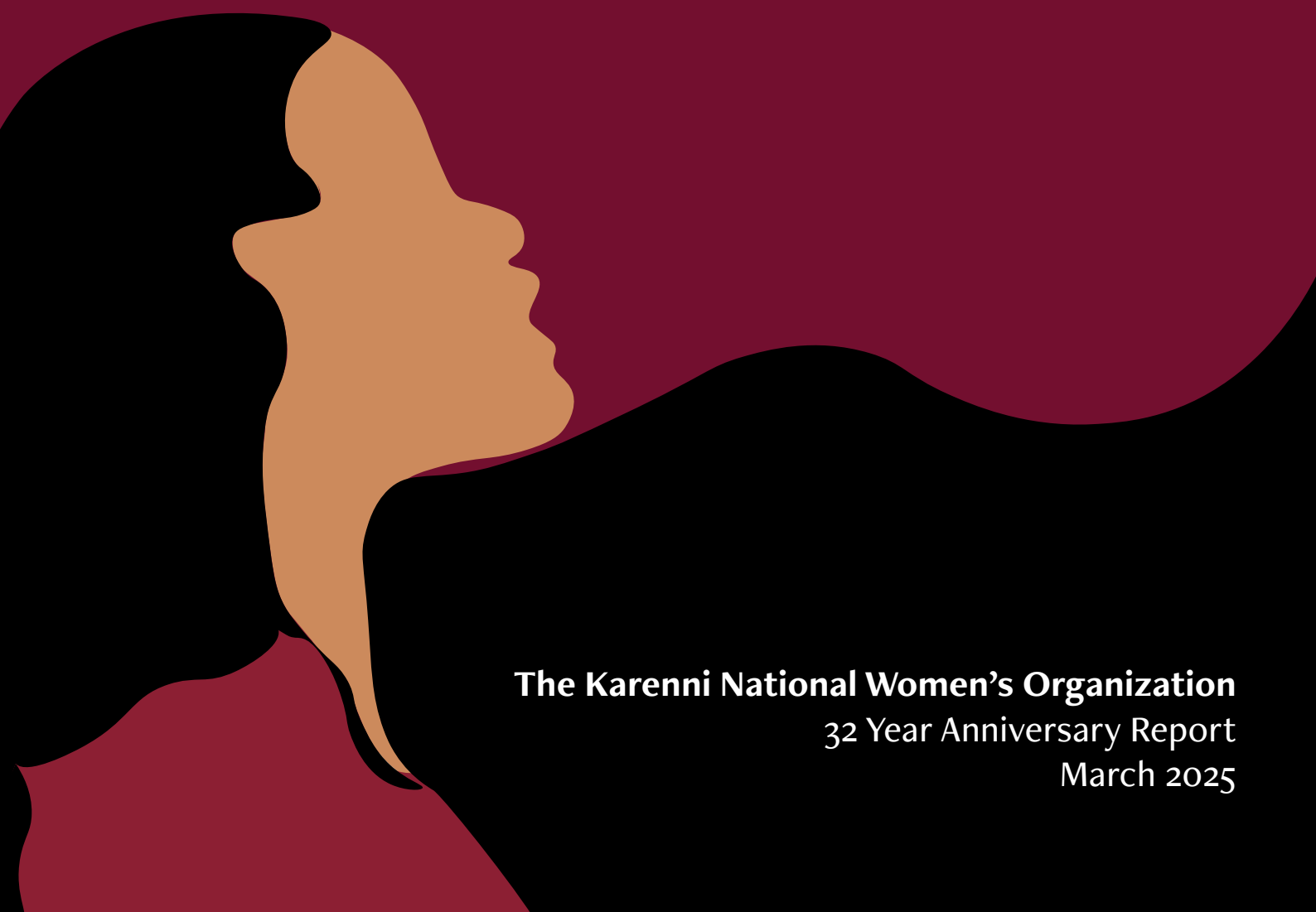




Silent Warriors

Celebrating 32-years of the
Karenni National Women's Organization



The Karenni National Women's Organization
32 Year Anniversary Report
March 2025

Silent Warriors

Thirty-Two Year Anniversary Report

February 2025

Table of Contents

Introduction	P.4
Background of KNWO	P.6
A Feminist Overview of the Karenni Revolution	P.9
KNWO Programs & Activities	P.10
Challenges Faced by Women in Karenni State	P.21
Access to Justice & Substantive Equality	P.24
Recommendations	P.26

Introduction

The Karenni National Women's Organisation (KNWO) was established on 10 March 1993 in a refugee camp along the Thai-Burma border. The organisation's vision is for women and girls in the refugee camps and in Karenni State to enjoy self-determination, equal political, economic, and social rights, and freedom from any form of violence.

Throughout our 32-year journey, we have collaborated with women, girls, and children on matters of protection, empowerment, peace, and security. We also work with women and girls to achieve justice and help refugees access resettlement.

Additionally, we have documented human rights violations perpetrated by the Burmese military and recorded numerous incidents of violence where victims and survivors were unable to find avenues for justice and accountability.

For more than three decades, KNWO has been committed to promoting and amplifying the voices of Karenni communities. Our work focuses on protecting the rights of young women and girls through several programs that curb inequality in Karenni State. As an ethnic state prone to internal conflict with the junta, KNWO has consistently and reliably responded to humanitarian emergencies where urgently needed materials and support are required inside Burma.

KNWO operates in seven townships across Karenni State, including Loikaw, Shadaw, Demoso, Hpruso, Bawlakhe, and Mese, as well as in Pekon Township in southern Shan State. KNWO is also active within the Karenni refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border.

Women in our community depend on us for essential supplies that they cannot access due to conflict and unforeseen hardships. We provide dignity kits, shelter essentials, food, warm clothing, and hygiene items like toothpaste, toothbrushes, and soap, ensuring they receive support with dignity and care.

These materials help them cope with challenging post-conflict conditions while upholding their dignity. The response plans by KNWO are always highly coordinated and sensitive to the risks they may face in challenging scenarios.

There have been many obstacles over the last 32 years. Burma is fundamentally a patriarchal culture, and men in senior positions in the military have deliberately sought to limit and undermine pathways to advance women's rights. However, there have also been significant gains and progress regarding changing the social and gendered landscape.

Women's participation since the February 2021 coup has shifted the social order in Burma. This extends to spaces where women have traditionally been deemed the caretakers of the home and children, but not to the extent where they have typically declared 'the head of household.' Even within their own homes, they have no guarantee of protection, given the high likelihood of the junta intruding in search of evidence of pro-democracy activities.

Despite this, women have continued seeking and engaging in activities illustrating their leadership abilities. Shortly after the coup, countless women and girls protested publicly by banging pots and pans together in defiance. According to Burmese beliefs, the beating aims to 'drive out demonic forces.' But in this case, the junta was the target. For women, this action encourages broader participation within the home, as do youth and those living with mental and physical disabilities.

As the pro-democracy movement advances, so do the gender expectations that once confined women and girls to traditional roles. Women are pushing the boundaries of preconceived gender norms, challenging the narrative to reclaim their autonomy and ability to resist. KNWO has repeatedly witnessed the courage of women overcoming immense barriers, instilling in us the hope that while there may always be obstacles, there will also be an unwavering commitment to overcoming them.

There also remains an ongoing need for human rights and feminist education. We are taking action by empowering women leaders in Karenni State. Burma's future belongs to its people, and by equipping women with the knowledge and skills to defend their rights, they can face the ongoing crisis with strength, dignity, and decisive action.

Background of KNWO

The Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO) is a non-profit community-based organization founded in 1993 by Karenni women who fled to Thailand seeking asylum from military attacks. At the time KNWO was established, women were facing serious human rights violations by the military junta, including rape, torture, and forced labour. Despite fleeing conflict areas, countless refugees continued to experience discrimination and domestic violence in the camps.

Our political role as a women's organization is to advocate for women's rights, protection, and empowerment through education, awareness raising, advocacy, and other innovative approaches. KNWO works to advance women's rights, protection, and empowerment through these activities.

We focus on filling gaps in service provision in the Karenni State while uplifting marginalized communities. Our reach extends to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities, ensuring that vulnerable groups receive essential support and services. We operate with a dedicated and passionate team eager to promote women's empowerment and gender equity while successfully implementing various community projects and initiatives.

We manage our projects while coordinating closely with stakeholders, including other civil society organizations and ethnic revolution organizations (EROs), particularly regarding safety and security within Karenni State. Through various community projects, KNWO is classified as a service institution for women, youth, and children. We envision a society where Karenni women enjoy equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic, and social spheres.



Photo: A representative from KNWO casts her vote during the regular elections at the KNWO Congress.

In 2023, on the 30th anniversary of our founding, we released our political manifesto. The manifesto stated that Karenni liberation would not occur until Karenni women were freed from oppression. We strongly believe that women and girls have the right to participate in politics and the economy.

Through its various community projects, KNWO considers itself a service institution for women, youth, and children. Inspired and motivated by our vision of enjoying full equal rights in society, being free from violence, and having the right to determine our destiny and cultural autonomy, we have affirmed our commitment to combating not only patriarchy but also the militarism that oppresses Karenni women.

Over the years, KNWO has carved a niche as the activist's role of women's peace and security. The organization's thematic focus areas encompass women's empowerment, gender equality, and promoting women's peace, security and democracy.

The women's peace and security agenda (WPS) is critical to advancing to ensure a democratic federal union with gender equality. ***The core pillars of the Women, Peace and Security framework are:***

A. Participation: The framework emphasizes the need to include women in all stages of conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding efforts. This includes their involvement in peace negotiations, political processes, and post-conflict reconstruction.

B. Protection: The framework calls for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and the rights of women, girls and gender minorities during and after armed conflicts. It highlights the importance of addressing impunity for such crimes and providing support services to survivors.

C. Prevention: The framework emphasizes the importance of preventing violence against women and girls by addressing the root causes of conflict through a gender lens and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. It recognizes that addressing gender inequalities and promoting women's rights are key to preventing and resolving conflicts.

Our political role as a women's organization is to advocate for women's rights, protection, and empowerment through education, awareness raising, advocacy, and other innovative approaches. KNWO works to advance women's rights, protection, and empowerment through these activities.

D. Relief and Recovery: The framework emphasizes addressing women’s specific needs and priorities in humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery efforts. It calls for gender-responsive

Further, our rich history, strong commitment to gender equality, and collaborative approach make it vital to promote women’s rights, peace, and federal democracy within the Karenni State and along the Thai-Burma border. Our dedicated staff and community projects reflect its unwavering commitment to creating a more equitable and just society for all.

Mission	Vision
<i>To ensure that KNWO is internationally recognized as a women’s organization and to advocate for equal rights, empowerment, protection, livelihood, and peaceful society for women and girls living in refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border and Karenni State.</i>	<i>Every woman and girl should have the freedom to make their own choices, enjoy equal rights in social, economic, and political life, and live free from violence.</i>

To achieve its mission and vision, KNWO seeks to:

- Build the capacity of women to be decision-makers and leaders in their families and communities;
- Promote and protect Karenni women’s rights locally and globally;
- Provide necessary services and support to women and children to ensure their well-being.

A Feminist Overview of the Karenni Revolution

The significance of the Karenni resistance movement in 1972 was that more women joined the revolution. According to a central committee member of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), in 2022, more than a hundred female members joined the KNPP. They took on different roles as soldiers, medics, and teachers. During that period, the female party members organized and attempted to establish a women's organization or a party women's wing. However, they were unsuccessful due to the lack of support from the party's leadership. Nonetheless, women have continued to advocate for more opportunities to participate in various social and political arenas in Burma.

Following the formation of the Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) after splitting from the KNPP in 1978, the female members were able to support the party members in continuing the armed and political struggle. However, in 1980, the attempt to form a women's union also failed due to the lack of support from the leadership.

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) is a membership-based organization advocating for women's rights in Burma. It has long championed a minimum of 30 percent female participation. KNWO is also an active member of the WLB, with several former and current staff members working in various leadership positions within the network.

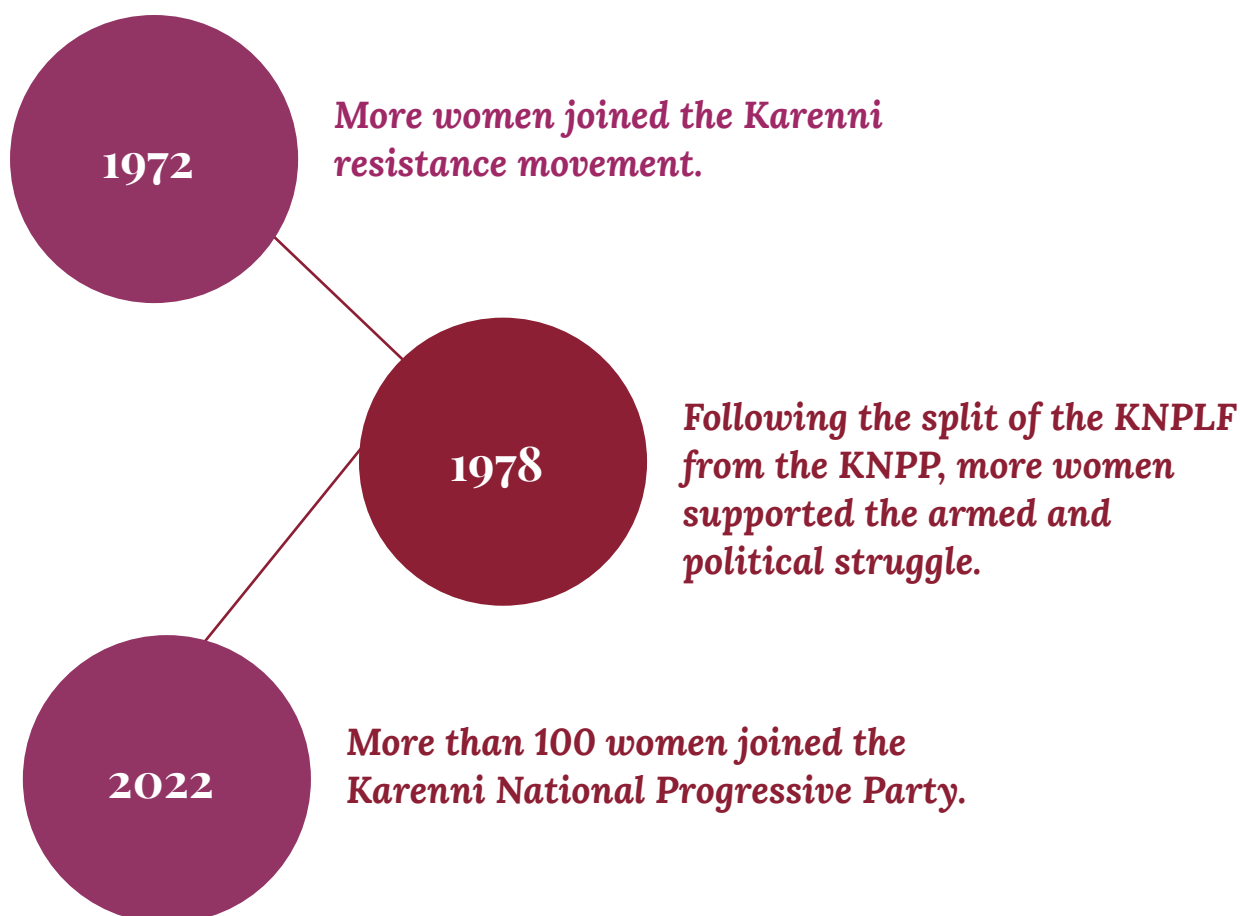




Photo: The KNWO Chairwoman shares words of encouragement during the sixth Congress.

KNWO Programs and Activities (2008 - Present)

1989 to 2012:

In 1989, following attacks on Karenni villages by the military, residents from the east side of the Salween River were forced to flee to the Thai border. Efforts to establish a women's organization succeeded in 1993 at the Karenni Refugee camp in Ban Mae Surin, Thailand. Fighting once again intensified in 1996, prompting many Karenni to escape to the Thai-Burma border, where KNWO had begun conducting programs and activities.

Since its inception, KNWO has been guided by the objective of providing services to meet the basic needs of women and children in the Karenni refugee camp. These services include measures to prevent and respond to domestic violence against women and cross-border aid initiatives.

The refugee camps in Thailand were formally established after 1990, with six Karenni Refugee camps during the period. However, the Thai authorities combined the six camps into two in 2001. According to a health worker at KNPP, the mortality rate of women was highest in the camps around 1990 to 1996, with most of the women dying in childbirth as there were no facilities for delivering the babies in the camps.

After KNWO was formally established, our early work focused primarily on supporting refugees seeking assistance after fleeing attacks by the Burma Army in their villages. We began setting up our initial operations and sought donors and sustainable funding. We also started advocating for the safety and protection of conflict-affected communities, particularly women, children, and the elderly, who are among the most vulnerable.

KNWO began undertaking cross-border aid initiatives, such as supporting nursery schools in District 2, Hpasaung Township, Karenni State, and hygiene initiatives for women and girls. We also offered capacity-building on gender-based violence, women's rights, and community development.

2010-2020

Over the next decade, KNWO focused on the developments within Burma's peace process and advocated for women's participation, especially in leadership roles. We worked collectively within our community and the WLB to highlight women's voices and expertise in leadership positions.

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was launched in 2011, though the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) signed the bilateral agreement. In 2012, after negotiating a state-level ceasefire agreement between the KNPP and the Burmese Army, the border-based (exiled) civil society organizations, including the KNWO, re-established themselves inside the country.

KNWO was conducting public consultations, and the first Karenni women's conference, attended by over 400 women, took place in Demawso Township during the bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Burma Army in 2012. At the meeting, delegates discussed the situation of women in the local area and refugee camps. Following a request from the local community, KNWO opened a branch office in Karenni State in early 2013 and reorganized with the women in the state.

The political situation in Burma changed significantly after the 2015 General Elections, which the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won in a landslide. In 2016, three women represented the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) at the 21st Century Panlong Conference. The liaison offices in the Karenni states were led by women leaders, mainly the two female executive committee members of the KNPP.

Burma's historical roots complicate equality, as ceasefires have been relatively unsuccessful. In 2015, the NLD government led the peace process through the

National Reconciliation for Peace Centre, which replaced the Myanmar Peace Centre. The peace process involved several actors: the government, military, ethnic political parties, and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). The Peace Conferences were initially meant to take place every six months. However, the last dialogue was held in July 2018.

In November 2020, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the national election in its second landslide since coming to power in 2015. Six women from Karenni State were elected, including two women who won seats in the State Parliament. During the 2020 General Elections, women's organizations, including KNWO, supported women candidates from ethnic political parties.

Throughout this period, KNWO conducted community consultations, conferences, and forums to organize and amplify women's voices and advocate for them to ethnic leaders and state governments.



Photo: A KNWO consultation meeting is held to review coordinating activities and delegate responsibilities among the staff.

In 2020, KNWO faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conflict-affected communities, including refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), experienced gaps in access to life-saving information and personal protective equipment (PPE). The NLD responded to the pandemic by forming an emergency task force with military and civilian ministries to support measures around law enforcement and stability.

Unfortunately, the military's failure to adhere to a global ceasefire presented many challenges. Fighting remained active, especially in conflict areas and as a result, many healthcare providers and systems in ethnic areas suffered from underdeveloped infrastructure, which undermined the type of care and services that were available.

Throughout the pandemic, KNWO stepped in to support communities in Karenni State after it became clear that the Burmese military and government response was ineffective. Between 2021 and 2022, we supported over 2,000 Karenni women in camps and more than 5,000 families along the border to assist those in remote areas. Their efforts included education and awareness on women's protection from human rights violations, livelihood projects, daycare centers, nursery schools, and campaigns focused on women's rights and advocacy.

In addition, to mitigate the risks of the virus spreading, KNWO also raised awareness in the community to ensure COVID-19 was contained by encouraging 'stay at home' measures and social distancing whenever possible, especially in highly populated areas such as markets and local vendors. Many new challenges for women also emerged during this period; several lost their jobs and struggled to earn a daily income to buy food.

To alleviate some of the burdens, which fell primarily on women, KNWO provided food hygiene and dignity kits to the people of the Karenni state. KNWO also addressed a lack of awareness, particularly among those living in rural areas, by providing knowledge and life-saving information, including:

- **Providing information/awareness-raising materials** in the Karenni language on how to prevent COVID-19 and stay safe, informed
- **Distribution of dry food** such as rice, oil, onion and yellow bean to 60,000 households in seven townships in Karenni State
- **Provision of hygiene materials** such as soap, soap powder, hand gel and sanitary pads to 100,000 people in seven townships
- **Advocacy and information** about the referral pathways available for victims of gender-based violence, including a helpline



Photo: KNWO staff deliver urgently needed humanitarian assistance, including food, hygiene kit items and various other materials for internally displaced people.

KNWO successfully distributed food to communities in seven Karenni townships and the Thai-Karenni border, and provided personal protective equipment, such as masks and hand gel. It ensured that those receiving the materials knew how to use them.

We also prioritized women's health by providing sanitary pads for women and girls in rural areas to ensure the pandemic did not compromise their access to menstrual products. During this period, much of the awareness of COVID-19 was based on materials developed by KNWO to ensure dissemination in the Karenni language and audiovisual resources for the deaf or those who could not read.

KNWO also assisted with producing a video in Karenni, which was shared on YouTube.¹ The footage included additional prevention measures to stay safe during this challenging period. KNWO translated the text and recorded it for inclusion in ethnic languages.

2021-2025

On 1 February 2021, the Burma Army declared a year-long state of emergency after illegally attempting a coup. Since then, the human rights situation has unravelled, with millions of people displaced, the majority being women and children. Across the country, thousands saw their lives uprooted and changed as protests denouncing the military's action were followed by increased rates of violence by the junta.

Within one week of the military coup, people in Karenni State began actively protesting. KNWO became involved in the strike committee activities in the Karenni capital city of Loikaw. Our team helped organize public protests. We were also actively planning women's day events on 8 March, showing the collective organizing power of women.

In Karenni State, the military has attacked peaceful protesters and detained youth leaders. On 10 March 2021, soldiers began open firing on young people demonstrating. For safety reasons, KNWO was forced to suspend our programs during this time, but they have since been reinstated.

The ongoing conflict in Burma threatens civilian safety. The Burmese Army is conducting increased militarized activities, including heavy artillery fire. Beginning in May 2021, civilians across the country, including in Karenni State, were forced to flee their homes and move to the jungle.

¹ See Youtube: ***What is the coronavirus, and how can you stay safe?*** (Karenni version)

”

“The Burmese Army continues to conduct militarized activities, including the use of heavy artillery against civilians in Karenni State. Women and children are the most vulnerable in conflict,”

- Mie Mie, KNWO Chairwoman



Photo: KNWO staff provide information to communities, notably women and young girls, in Karenni State to empower and educate them on their rights and freedoms.

In February 2023, KNWO published a joint report with several local Karenni civil society organizations, including the Kayan Women’s Organization-KyWO, the Karenni Human Rights Group-KnHRG and the Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network - KSPMN, titled “How Can We Survive in the Future?: Atrocity Crimes in Karenni State.”² The report found human rights violations amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by junta forces in Burma’s Karenni State and surrounding areas between May 2021 and September 2022.

“The Burmese Army continues to conduct militarized activities, including the use of heavy artillery against civilians in Karenni State. Women and children are the most vulnerable in conflict,” said Mie Mie, Chairwoman of the Karenni National Women’s Organization. *“Civilians across the country, including Karenni State, have been forced to flee their homes and move to the jungle. The situation has become increasingly unstable due to armed clashes.”*

² ***How can we survive in the future?: Atrocity Crimes in Karenni State.*** Karenni National Women’s Organization Kayan Women’s Organization, Karenni Human Rights Group, Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network

In June 2023, the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) was established with six members. Despite being the smallest State in Burma, Karenni stakeholders were the first to organize an independent, interim government *“to make efforts to bring stability and peace to the state through a check and balance of legislative, executive and judiciary sectors and to make practical cooperation with various forces in the state.”*³

A 2024 report by the Karenni Civil Society Network, KNWO, Progressive Voice and the Union of Karenni State Youth on Karenni State’s governance architecture drew on the significant gains of the IEC and its plans for the future to achieve a federal democracy.⁴ The paper describes the IEC as playing a *“pivotal role in developing a decentralized multi-actor public administration mechanism that coordinates the provision of essential public services such as education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid.”*⁵

³ [Karenni State Interim Executive Council officially formed](#), BNI, 12 June 2023

⁴ [Federalism from the Ground Up: The Karenni Model of Nation-State Building](#), Karenni Civil Society Network, Karenni National Women’s Organization, Progressive Voice, the Union of Karenni State Youth, October 2024

⁵ Ibid

70%

of IDPs in Karenni State are women and children.



Photo: KNWO staff are providing and allocating much-needed materials to internally displaced people.

KNWO has collaborated with the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC) and the IEC, including the Women and Child Affairs Department, to develop strategies in targeted areas that promote women's rights and protection. Both the IEC and KSCC have emphasized gender representation and diversity.

Additionally, KNWO co-founded the KSCC in 2021 following the attempted military coup. As of December 2024, the KSCC has 30 percent female representatives. While the KSCC previously had 40 percent female leadership, adding two male council members altered the proportion. Several women in leadership roles with robust backgrounds are involved in civil society organizations, including a former KNWO staff member, and currently represent the women's group to serve as the General Secretary of the KSCC.

KNWO and the IEC work together to provide services to those severely affected by the conflict. Up to 70 percent of IDPs in Karenni State are women and children. These efforts are coordinated through leaders in the IDP camps and camp management committees, including women leaders and their various networks and support systems.

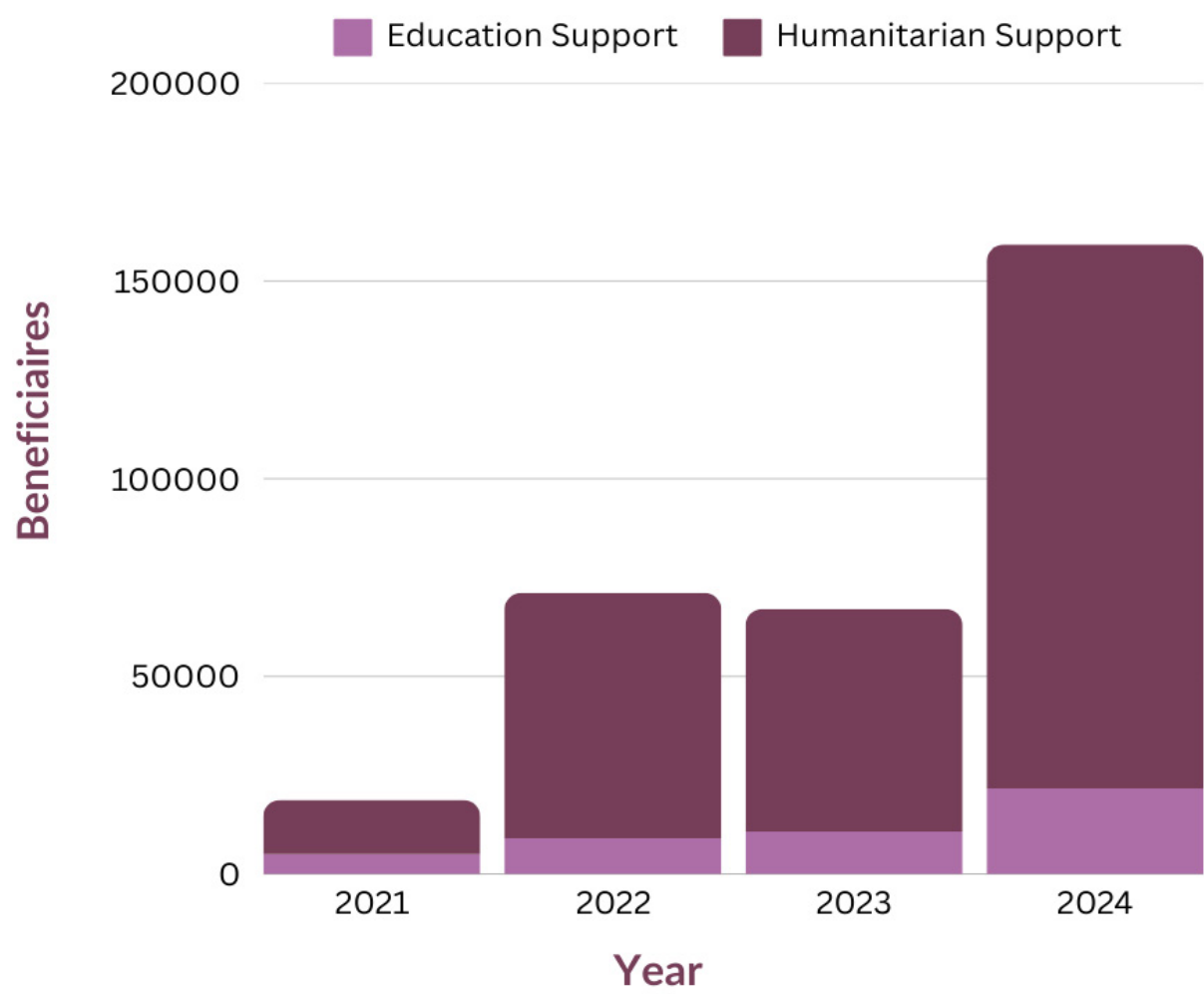
KNWO also helps review policy developments and advocates for women's protection and leadership positions. As a trusted community-based organization, KNWO can be depended on as a reliable source of information and for delivering the most in need.

Between 2021 and 2024, KNWO provided services to the local community, including workshops and awareness campaigns focused on gender mainstreaming. During this period, there was a notable increase in cases of emotional violence, physical violence, and rape. This rise can be attributed to the growing lack of protection that women and girls face as violence has escalated since the coup.

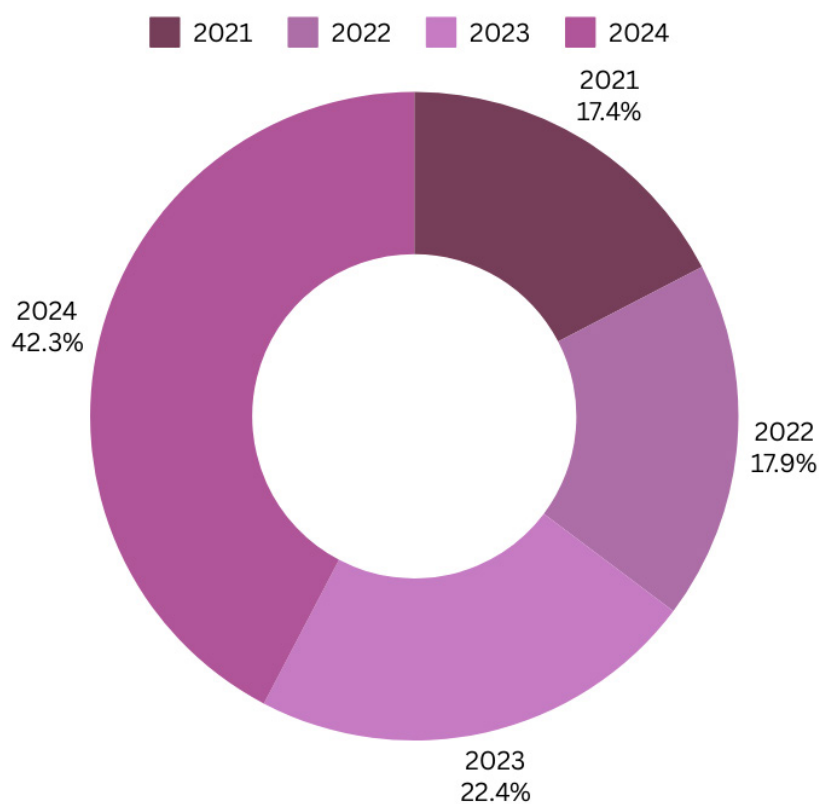


Photos (left and right): KNWO staff organize training in the community to share information about their activities and increase their knowledge.

The following data depicts further details of the cases that KNWO collected.



Cases of Sexual Violence in Karenni State | 2021 - 2024



In 2021, KNWO held training and workshops on education for 5,006 beneficiaries. KNWO also conducted 12 types of training, including gender mainstreaming, women's leadership, and counselling. We also conducted a series of group discussions on the challenges women and men face. Throughout the year, KNWO conducted outreach and home visits. There were 69 cases of sexual violence in 2021 documented by KNWO, including emotional violence, physical violence and rape.

Community consultations are significant for KNWO. They ensure effective coordination and prevent duplication of program activities. KNWO meets with the KNPP and the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC). During these discussions, crucial conversations occur regarding camp management, the challenges faced, and how KNWO can assist in mitigating the gaps. There were 39 coordination meetings in 2021.

KNWO has always focused on humanitarian response, including distributing various items. In 2021, KNWO provided 13,776 people with dignity kits, hygiene kits, food items, CDM support, Shelter kits, nutrition kits, cash assistance, COVID-19 kits, support for women human rights defenders, and livelihood assistance.



Photo: KNWO staff provides materials to internally displaced people and conflict-affected communities.

2022

In 2022, KNWO's education workshops benefited 9,041 people, and humanitarian support was allocated, ensuring that 62,085 people received dignity kits, hygiene kits, food items, support for the Civil Disobedience Movement, shelter kits, nutrition kits, cash assistance, COVID-19 kits, support for women human rights defenders, and livelihood assistance.

KNWO reported 71 cases in 2022 of emotional violence, domestic abuse, including physical assault and rape.

2023

In 2023, KNWO's work on educational training and workshops served 10,779 people. There were 30 coordination meetings, and humanitarian support assisted 56,314 civilians in need. An alarming number of people have been forced to leave their homes without time to gather their belongings.

There was a rise in violence in 2023, with 89 cases of emotional violence, domestic abuse including physical assault and rape.

2024

Education training and workshops by KNWO reached 21,641 people in 2024. We held several coordination meetings with other stakeholders to ensure humanitarian support was provided to 137,554 people. Alarming, there was an even more significant rate of violence, with 168 cases of abuse and violence against women.



Photo: A training is held by KNWO as young participants are seen learning and interacting.

Challenges Faced by Women in Karenni State

Since the military coup on 1 February 2021, the attacks against civilians, including women and children, have increased. The junta has abducted, tortured, and killed unarmed residents. Deep-rooted sexualized violence threatens the safety of displaced women and children who have been routinely forced to flee the junta's offensives. Civilian casualties are growing as a result of landmines, airstrikes and indiscriminate shelling and artillery. Yet, the momentum behind the Spring Revolution has energized the people of the Karenni State, who are determined to see an end to the military dictatorship.



Civilian casualties are growing as a result of landmines, airstrikes and indiscriminate shelling and artillery. Yet, the momentum behind the Spring Revolution has energized the people of the Karenni State, who are determined to see an end to the military dictatorship.

Patriarchy

Women have been marginalized, relegated to subordinate roles, and face extensive gender-based discrimination. Traditionally, women in rural areas are constrained by unequal rights and financial dependence on their husbands. Gender discrimination permeates every aspect of life and opportunities for women to assume leadership roles are scarce.

Additionally, women and girls are often perceived as transient assets, mainly as they leave their parent's households upon marriage. This prevailing bias against educating and empowering women perpetuates a vicious cycle of subordination and limited opportunities. Many women are financially dependent on their husbands and experience a lack of income despite engaging in unpaid work such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children or younger siblings, and assisting with farm work. The power dynamics are unequal, leading to domestic and gender-based violence. There is little community support for survivors of violence, perpetuating the cycle of abuse.

The 2021 attempted military coup has intensified the challenges faced by women and children, rendering them more vulnerable to violence and exploitation, particularly in conflict-affected regions. Women are disproportionately affected as they are often at home, engaged in household responsibilities and childcare, during attacks. This diminishes their agency and exposes them to precarious situations.

KNWO has been actively addressing these issues through Gender-Based Violence (GBV) projects in Karenni State. These efforts have highlighted a disturbing trend of increasing GBV cases, as documented in KNWO's GBV case management records. A significant factor contributing to this rise in violence is the lack of family and community support for women survivors. The root cause, however, lies in traditional gender roles that trap women in financial dependence on their husbands, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Militarization

In conflict situations, women are at risk of sexual violence and displacement, which threatens their overall well-being. Despite being a small team, KNWO responds to the needs of our community by purchasing items most in need, including food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

Armed conflict in Karenni State makes life more difficult for women and children. They are particularly vulnerable during the fighting, facing risks of sexual violence and exploitation through forced recruitment or carrying supplies. Women, often at home during attacks—especially in rural areas where they manage household duties and childcare—find themselves in precarious situations. Consequently, their reduced power places them in vulnerable circumstances.

In the IDP camps, many families have been separated and face daily difficulties accessing food due to fighting. There are water shortages, and due to being located in remote areas and limited transportation options, private donors cannot reach the camp during the rainy season. No trucks or cars are in the centers, so it is tough for people to escape quickly if they are under attack.

Gasoline prices have increased alongside the economic turmoil and inflation in the country. IDPs are compelled to flee repeatedly, often walking long distances without food or water in search of safety. Their priority is the struggle for food and survival, as well as escaping the presence of Burma Army soldiers.

KNWO is a women's organization that prioritizes the safety and well-being of all people. The people in the Karenni state are being deeply traumatized because of the conflict. Sounds of artillery shells being fired have terrified them. Civilians feel incredibly insecure. KNWO promotes and carries out pathways to provide more psychosocial counselling and trauma healing for the survivors of the conflict and organizes capacity building for the women at the leadership level in the camp committee.

Gender Discrimination and Stereotypes

Women have been marginalized in Karenni State. Traditionally, women have been expected to undertake unpaid work to manage the household and, in doing so, remain financially dependent on their husbands. This lack of control over finances has increased economic inequality, as women feel disempowered to make choices. One of the root causes is that men are the primary wage earners while women, constrained by traditional gender roles, remain financially dependent on their husbands. As a result, the cycle of violence is perpetuated in Karenni state. It also increases their risks of being exposed to gender-based violence.

KNWO has been implementing gender-based violence (GBV) projects in Karenni State and found that the number of victims has increased since the coup, according to KNWO's GBV case management records.

The people in the Karenni state are being deeply traumatized because of the conflict. Civilians feel incredibly insecure. Therefore, KNWO prioritizes providing safe and accessible pathways to provide more psychosocial counselling and trauma healing for the survivors of the conflict.

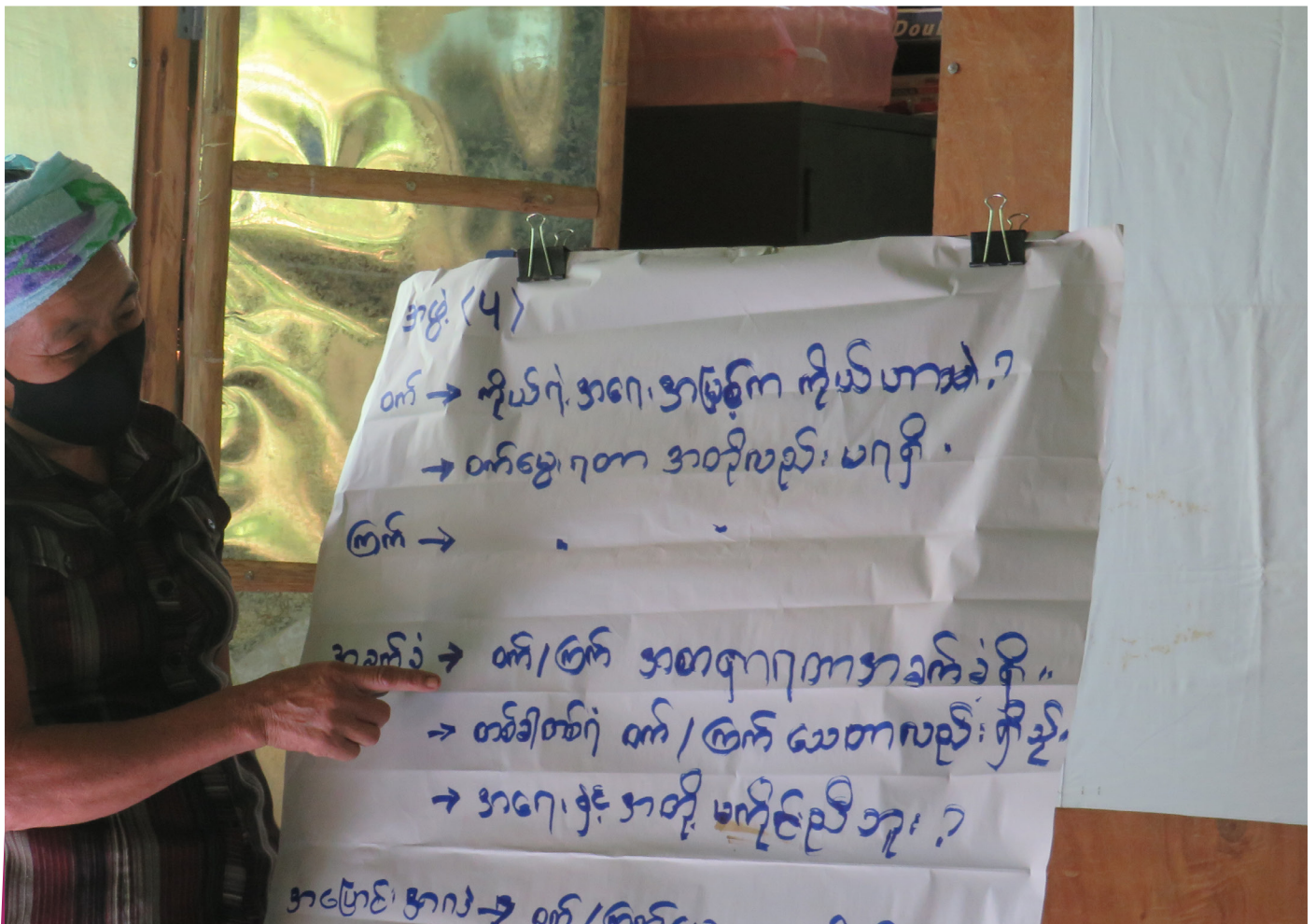


Photo: A participant from a KNWO training shares ideas and input on the discussion held.

Access to Justice & Substantive Equality

In Karenni State, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been forced to flee their villages due to clashes between the Burmese military and the civilian defence forces. Displaced women and children face an increased risk during this humanitarian crisis, as their safety is compromised. At the same time, they lack access to clean drinking water and nutritious food. The current circumstances have also led to them being deeply traumatized.

Socially and educationally, women face significant disadvantages as livelihood opportunities are non-existent and accessing education becomes impossible while constantly fleeing violence. KNWO is working to support over 210,000 displaced individuals across the country. With 325 temporary shelters and 93 internal displacement camps in Karenni State and 11 along the Karenni-Shan border, IDPs have numerous urgent needs, including rice, cooking oil, salt, drinking water, hygiene supplies, shelter, and medical assistance supplies.

The victims of the junta's assaults on innocent civilians include women, children and the elderly. The soldiers do not discriminate based on age, gender, religion or socio-economic status. Ethnic people have been targeted by the military junta for decades. IDPs from eastern and western parts of Loikaw, Demoso and Hpruso Townships have been especially devastated by the junta's offensives in their attempts to weaken morale and reclaim bases seized by resistance forces.

KNWO is working to support over 210,000 displaced individuals across the country.

Civilians continue to suffer tremendous hardships. Numerous individuals have lost their families and homes as human rights violations persist. Given the widespread violence, women and girls face significant risks to their safety, which is continually compromised by the absence of safe shelter and protection. Thirty-five women were killed in 2024, according to the Department of Women and Children under the Karenni Interim Executive Council (IEC).⁶ According to KNWO, nearly 60 women and children have been killed over the past three years.⁷

Airstrikes are among the main threats facing civilians. The Blood Money Campaign - Action Network reported that between early 2021 and November 2024, the junta conducted approximately 4,020 airstrikes throughout the country, resulting in

⁶ [35 Women and Children Killed by Military Junta's Attacks in Karenni State](#) in 2024, BNI, 18 January 2025

⁷ Ibid

around 2,250 fatalities and about 3,400 injuries.⁸ The IEC has also documented the intensity and frequency of the airstrikes in Karenni State, which found that between January and June 2024, nearly 50 people had lost their lives in the junta's attacks from the air.⁹

Earlier this year, KNWO reported that domestic violence cases have surged, doubling in 2024 compared to pre-2021 levels. In the past 12 months, there have been 101 reported incidents involving physical violence, psychological abuse, and sexual assault.¹⁰

“Domestic violence cases have significantly increased since the military coup,” said Maw Byar Mar Oo, the KNWO vice president.¹¹

“The economic hardships faced by displaced families have contributed to rising tensions within households.”

The military has continued to kill women human rights defenders as retribution for their activism against the junta. Countless warrantless raids have resulted in women being arrested in their homes. Numerous cases have emerged of mothers, sisters, wives, and children being held hostage by the regime in place of family members who had also taken on the military in some form.

Women are struggling to survive as there are no livelihood opportunities. This has led to additional stress during this conflict period, which has worsened since the coup. They must sustain themselves on the little food available because they have no jobs, as it is also very unsafe to work amid ongoing attacks by the junta. They must endure and stay strong for their families as they continue to urge the international community to take action and respond to their many challenges by holding the junta accountable.

KNWO's efforts have been crucial in addressing the urgent needs of Karenni women and families. By providing essential services, education, and advocacy, KNWO has offered immediate relief and empowered women to protect their rights and build sustainable livelihoods. As conflict and displacement persist, the organization remains vital in ensuring that Karenni women and their communities have the resources and support needed to navigate these ongoing challenges.

⁸ [Junta Airstrikes Increasingly Targeting Civilians](#), Burma News International, 23 January 2025

⁹ [48 Civilians Killed in Six Months in Karenni State](#), Including 16 from Air Strikes, Kantarawaddy Times, 11 July 2024

¹⁰ [Women in Karenni State face increasing levels of violence](#), DVB, 2 January 2025

¹¹ Ibid

Recommendations

To the United Nations Security Council

- In line with its mandate to maintain international peace and security, take concrete actions to protect the people of Burma in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security and UNSCR 1674 on the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.
- Pass a UN Security Council resolution to enact specific measures:
 - Impose a no-fly zone over Burma;
 - Impose a comprehensive coordinated arms embargo on Burma;
 - Sanction the supply of aviation fuel to the Burmese military to limit its ability to launch airstrikes against civilian populations, including IDPs;
- Formally designate a safe zone for internally displaced persons in Karenni State under United Nations agencies' management, to which junta forces are denied access;
- Refer the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court.

To the International Community

- In line with obligations under UNSCR 1325, fully integrate the gender perspective in responding to the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Burma. Pay particular attention to protection of the rights of women and children, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, equal participation for women as key stakeholders in decision-making processes, and the rehabilitation needs of women and children;
- Consult with local civil society organizations for accurate, up-to-date information about the humanitarian crisis and human rights situation on the ground in Karenni areas;
- Avoid channelling humanitarian aid via international bodies required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the junta. Provide direct funding to local civil society and community-based organizations for the distribution of cross-border humanitarian aid to minimize overheads and maximise support reaching the internally displaced populations in Karenni areas;
- Increase funding to local civil society organizations for human rights education, human rights documentation and advocacy work, coupled with targeted long term psychosocial assistance for victims of torture and sexual and gender-based violence to support and empower them to speak out about the violations they have experienced;
- Increase direct funding and support to local civil society and community-based organizations to meet the following needs of internally displaced populations in Karenni areas:

- Sufficient nutritional food rations, clean water supply, shelter materials and sanitation facilities;
- Healthcare assistance, medicines and medical supplies, including dignity and personal hygiene kits, delivery kits, nutrition packs for children and the elderly, as well as sexual and reproductive health services for women;
- Psychosocial support and trauma healing for displaced communities, including for victims of torture and sexual and gender-based violence;
- Rehabilitation and physiotherapy support for victims with life-changing injuries and disabilities;
- Special considerations for women's safety and dignity in temporary shelters and communal areas of IDP sites;
- Education assistance for children and young people.
- Impose further coordinated targeted sanctions against the military and its leadership, specifically targeting Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprises;
- Impose a coordinated comprehensive global arms embargo on the Burmese military;
- Sanction aviation fuel supply to the Burmese military to limit its ability to launch airstrikes against civilian populations, including IDPs;
- Support international justice and accountability efforts by:
 - Recommending the International Criminal Court accept the declaration lodged by the National Unity Government of Burma, under Article 12(3) of the Court's Rome Statute, accepting the Court's jurisdiction concerning international crimes committed in Burma territory since 1 July 2002;
 - Proposing a UN Security Council resolution that refers the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court;
 - Publicly supporting the creation of an ad hoc international tribunal through the UN General Assembly or UN Human Rights Council, should a UN Security Council resolution on ICC referral fail;
 - Exercising universal jurisdiction to investigate any individual from Burma irrespective of position or rank – who may be responsible for committing genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity under international law, including in Karenni State

To ASEAN and its Member States

- Disbar Burmese military junta representatives from all ASEAN summits and meetings. Take measures to suspend Burma's membership at ASEAN until the military regime accepts the NUG as the legitimate government;
- Engage with a legitimate representative from the NUG and invite them to fill the seat of Burma at ASEAN summits and/or special meetings;
- Disregard the failed Five Point Consensus and develop a new course of action in consultation with civil society that will enforce coordinated, tangible steps to hold the military regime

Recommendations

accountable for its crimes and support the country's transition to a peaceful federal democratic state;

- As a neighboring State, Thailand should close its air space to Burmese junta forces in a bid to protect IDP and refugee populations in border areas from air strikes;
- Respect the principle of non-refoulement and provide protection and support for refugees from Karenni areas and other parts of Burma seeking refuge within the borders of ASEAN Member States;
- Take concrete action in coordination with international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council, UN General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Council, to end military violence in Burma.
- Immediately cease the sale of aircraft and military weapons to the armed forces and refrain from any cooperation. Such sales and purchases are causing daily airstrikes, leading to the deaths and destruction of the people in the state.

To the National Unity Government of Burma

- In line with obligations under UNSCR 1325, ensure that all armed groups under their control fully respect international law and take special measures to protect women and children from sexual and gender-based violence;
- Consult with Karenni-based civil society organizations for accurate, up-to-date information about the humanitarian crisis and human rights situation on the ground in Karenni areas and coordinate with them to support conflict-affected communities;
- Advocate for a designated safe zone for internally displaced persons in Karenni areas under United Nations agencies' management;
- Ensure a minimum 30 percent representation of women at decision-making levels across all sectors;
- Establish an inclusive federal democracy for all stakeholders, including all ethnic nationalities across Burma;
- Ensure the unconditional release of all political prisoners;
- Reform the national justice system to be in line with international human rights standards and respect for the rule of law, with particular attention to justice for women who have suffered sexual and gender-based violence and their rights under CEDAW.

To Karenni State Consultative Council-KSCC and the Interim Executive Council

- The KSCC and the IEC should approve and implement a gender policy immediately and systematically conduct follow-up actions.
- Foster strong collaborations with international allies, ethnic minorities, and civil society organizations.
- Create opportunities and capacity-building initiatives for the women involved within the organization.
- Address and resolve the gender-based violence cases that arise during the interim period clearly and decisively.
- Ensure practical actions against perpetrators, regardless of the organization or individual involved.

To the Ethnic Armed Organizations

- Establish comprehensive policies to ensure women's participation in leadership roles within organizational frameworks.
- Support women in the Revolution by providing adequate protection and creating procedures to address gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence, including resolution mechanisms.
- If EAOs commit crimes against civilians, the cases must be transferred to civilian courts without exception.
- To ensure the safety of internally displaced people, clear reallocation plans should be implemented for the public during state operations.
- Recognize and attentively listen to women in leadership roles across various sectors, including politics, education, and social service provision.



Silent Warriors

Celebrating 32-years of the
Karenni National Women's Organization

The Karenni National Women's Organization
32 Year Anniversary Report
March 2025