



September 9, 2016

Statement on KWAT's 17th anniversary denouncing escalating Burma Army offensives to seize control of Kachin State's natural resources

On this occasion of the 17th anniversary of KWAT's founding on September 9, 1999, we wish to express our grave concern at the escalating conflict in our Kachin homelands due to spreading Burma Army offensives.

Over the past six months, since the new NLD government came to power, we have seen expansion of thousands more Burma Army troops into Kachin areas, and increasing ground and air attacks to seize territories of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). These attacks have involved human rights abuses against civilians, including torture, killing, and sexual violence, and led to new displacement, adding to the over one hundred thousand already displaced since the renewal of war in Kachin areas in June 2011.

These attacks have continued at the same time as the government has been meeting with ethnic armed groups to discuss peace talks. Even during the 21st Century Panglong Conference last week, the Burma Army was launching an attack on KIA positions near Mogaung, only 50 kilometers from the Kachin capital of Myitkyina.

The objective of the attacks, to clear KIA away from resource-rich Phakant and Danai, and from along the old Ledo road -- now being eyed by China for development as a major trade route -- make it clear that the Burma Army is doing what it has always done. It is occupying and seizing control of ethnic lands and resources so that the central government and business elites can profit from them. The only difference now is that the government is democratically elected, and is claiming that it wants peace.

The recent 21st Century Panglong Conference was simply a show that masked the central government's ongoing exploitation at gunpoint of resources in the ethnic lands. If the government was sincere about peace, it should insist on a unilateral ceasefire by the Burma Army. It should stop selling off all the natural resources in the ethnic areas, including our rivers. It should immediately declare the cancellation of the Myitsone dam, a project that the Kachin people will never accept.

The only way that peace can be achieved in Burma is through establishing a genuine federal democracy, which grants ethnic peoples their rights to self-determination and to protect the natural resources in their areas. KWAT is committed to continue to work towards this aim.

KWAT urges the international community to exert pressure on the Burmese government to bring an immediate end to the Burma Army offensives and abuses in the ethnic areas, and begin political dialogue towards genuine federal reform. We particularly urge the United States government to maintain existing sanctions on Burma.

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