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REPORT LAUNCH: SEEKING JUSTICE

Kachin Women's Association – Thailand (KWAT) and Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) are releasing a new report on access to justice in Burma, in which we identify strategies for local civil society groups, demand political and legal reforms, and call on donor agencies to better support assistance to victims of the most serious human rights violations.

The report, called "*Seeking Justice, An analysis of obstacles and opportunities for civil society groups pursuing accountability for human rights violations in domestic courts in Kachin and Northern Shan States*", focuses on cases of human rights violations against 51 civilians committed by Burma security forces, in particular the military, between 2011 and 2019 in Kachin and Northern Shan States.

At the International Court of Justice on December 11, 2019, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi claimed that the Burma military justice system is willing and able to prosecute possible war crimes committed by its soldiers. Decades of human rights violations and impunity show the hypocrisy of this statement. The failure of domestic mechanisms to provide justice to victims has opened the way for the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to address some of the human rights violations committed by the Burma military.

In addition to those efforts at the international level, it is crucial to maintain pressure on the Burma government and military to fulfill their duty, as components of the State, to protect the rights of all people in Burma. This duty includes the obligation to investigate, prosecute, and punish human rights violations. Our research focused on the role that local civil society groups and community-based organizations can play in improving chances for justice. It gave us a detailed understanding of the formidable challenges and obstacles met by civil society groups trying to bring perpetrators to justice. It also provided a small window into possible opportunities for justice based on a handful of relatively "successful" cases.

These findings allowed us to identify strategies for local civil society groups, community-based organizations, and local leaders to better support victims seeking justice, including reinforcing their capacity, taking some specific actions, and developing legal strategies.

Based on our findings, we also call on both the government and the military to end human rights violations committed by State actors and undertake necessary political and legal reforms to ensure accountability and the rule of law (including putting the military and police under civilian control, and ensuring the independence of the judiciary). We also call on the international community to stop support to the Burma government and military until they undertake those necessary political and legal reforms. Finally, we call on international donor agencies to ensure that the financial support provided for access to justice in Burma specifically reaches community-based organizations and local civil society groups who are doing politically sensitive work by providing assistance to victims of the most serious human rights violations.

The report is available in English and Burmese here (<https://kachinwomen.com/?p=1251>)

Contact persons:

- Moon Nay Li (KWAT) +66 85 523 3791
- Laetitia Bonnet (AJAR) : +95 977 654 7506
- San Htoi (KWAT): +95 995 9880 580