

Statement by Members and Observers of the European Burma Network on the ongoing attacks by the Burma Army against the Kachin people

21st January 2013

We, the undersigned members and observers of the European Burma Network, condemn the ongoing attacks on the Kachin people and call on the international community to put pressure on President Thein Sein and the Burmese Army to immediately end the military offensive in Northern Burma and allow access to humanitarian aid for internally displaced persons.

Intense attacks against the Kachin have continued despite the government announcing an end to attacks on Friday.

Since late December, the Burmese Army intensified its attacks against the Kachin people, employing helicopters and fighter jets to launch a series of air strikes around Laiza, the town near the China-Burma border where the the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) headquarters is located. On Monday last, three civilians including a child were killed and four others injured when, for the first time, the Burmese Army directly bombarded the town of Laiza with rocket shells. Laiza is home to 6,000 civilians and in addition, 14,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) are sheltering in camps in and around Laiza.

The Burmese Army has been launching military offensives in Kachin State since June 2011, when it ended the 17-year long ceasefire agreement with the KIO. Since then, attacks on the Kachin people have been relentless, resulting in about 100,000 internally displaced persons, including around 75,000 in KIO-controlled areas where international aid is being blocked by President Thein Sein, resulting in hunger and disease. Burmese Army soldiers have committed horrific human rights violations against civilians which may be considered war crimes and crimes against humanity under international law. In his report to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2012, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Burma, Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana stated that he is 'particularly concerned at continuing serious human rights violations in conflict-affected ethnic border areas, which include attacks against civilian populations, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, internal displacement, land confiscations, the recruitment of child soldiers, forced labour and portering, and the use of landmines.'

The 17-year long ceasefire saw a fragile peace in Kachin State; however, it did not resolve the root problems, namely the lack of democracy and equality for the Kachin people and it did not lead to a meaningful political dialogue.

We call on the international community, including the United Nations and the European Union, to take a strong stance in persuading President Thein Sein to end the violence against the Kachin people and allow unrestricted access to humanitarian aid in the affected areas.

Furthermore, we call on the European Union to take the following measures:

- 1) That no further sanctions should be relaxed;
- 2) In relation to the upcoming review of the EU Common Decision, that a visa ban be re-introduced which includes all senior members of the Burmese military, all government

ministers who are serving members of the military, and all MPs who are serving members of the military;

3) That the other measures in the EU Common Position which are currently suspended continue to be suspended for a further year;

4) That EU members withdraw invitations to President Thein Sein to visit their countries;

5) That funding and other forms of support for government capacity building be suspended;

6) That mechanisms for monitoring implementation of the arms embargo be reviewed, with penalties for member states involved in violations of the arms embargo;

7) That the European Union and member states should provide financial assistance to locally based community NGOs in KIO-controlled areas in order to reach the tens of thousands of IDPs denied aid because free access to provide international aid is being blocked by President Thein Sein.

Endorsed by:

Actions Birmanie (Belgium)

Association Suisse Birmanie

Austrian Burma Center

Burma Aktion (Germany)

Burma Action Ireland

Burma Campaign UK

Burma Partnership

Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Denmark Karen Organisation

European Karen Network

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Info Birmanie (France)

Norwegian Burma Committee

Society for Threatened Peoples - Germany

Swedish Burma Committee

SDS - Swedish Social Democratic Students' Burma Project