



The Burma Government Must Unconditionally and Immediately Release Naw Ohn Hla

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By: Karen Women's Organization and Karen Women's Empowerment Group

The Karen Women's Organization ("KWO") and Karen Women's Empowerment Group ("KWEG") call for the immediate and unconditional release of Naw Ohn Hla, imprisoned in Burma for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and opinion. Naw Ohn Hla was sentenced yesterday to a six-month jail term with hard labour for her peaceful prayer service at the Shwedagon Pagoda eight years ago protesting against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest. She is already imprisoned at Insein Prison, serving a four year, four month sentence in connection with her presence outside the Chinese Embassy in Yangon to protest the brutal shooting of an unarmed woman at a peaceful protest outside the Letpadaung Copper Mine. Naw Ohn Hla's incarceration, and the continuing series of prosecutions, demonstrates that the Burma government is not serious about establishing democracy and allowing civilians fundamental freedoms. We call on the Burma government to immediately release Naw Ohn Hla and dismiss all charges against her, fulfilling the promises made to the international community to allow citizens to exercise basic rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international law and to establish a true democracy in Burma.

Naw Ohn Hla was sentenced under the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, adopted in 2012 and amended in 2014, which despite its title has been used to squash peaceful dissent. Naw Ohn Hla faces additional charges in three other districts under the same law. While the Burma government has passed and amended some laws in a bid to prove its democratic bona fides, other laws that traditionally have been used to punish and imprison dissenters remain on the books and new repressive laws have been passed. The Burma government continues to use all of these laws as tools of repression against activists and peaceful protesters.

The Burma government should respect the right to freedom of expression and allow peaceful protests to take place, even those which criticize the government. Peaceful protesters should not face threats or intimidation or be subject to arrest. KWO and KWEG calls on the Burma government to release and drop all charges against Naw Ohn Hla and others held in prison solely for peaceful expression and protest. KWO and KWEG further calls on the international community to pressure the Burma government for Naw Ohn Hla's unconditional and immediate release and the unconditional and immediate release of all prisoners of conscience.

For further information, contact:

1. Naw K'nyaw Paw - +95 9425029023
2. Naw Susanna Hla Hla Soe - +95 9250795258
3. Naw Ta Mla Saw - +66 810266738