

Joint Statement of Mon organizations on Mon Women's Day

March 16, 2011

Today, Mon people in Monland as well as overseas celebrate Mon Women's Day to promote women's participation in social, economic, and political processes. The Mon Women's Day is observed annually on the birthday of Mon Queen, Mi Jao Bu Bu (Her Majesty Banya Htau), the 12th Waxing day of the 12th month in Mon Lunar Calendar, which falls on March 16 in this year 2011. Queen Mi Jao Bu ruled the Hongsawatoi Mon Kingdom in the 15th century, in righteousness and peace. Queen Mi Jao Bu was the only queen who reigned in the history of Burma and her serenity, courage, and wisdom still inspires us all.

Presently, Mon women have faced difficult challenges in taking their rightful place in areas of decision-making. Amongst the biggest challenges are lack of education and training, and discrimination stemming from misguided cultural traditions. Despite these challenges, Mon women are working hard to achieve their full participation in different aspects of the Mon national affairs. Like women worldwide, an "equal access to education, training and science and technology" is a must for Mon women to protect themselves from exploitation and to exercise their rights. However, in Burma, there is no mechanism in place which would allow an equal access to education or income-earning opportunities for women. The country's new constitution adopted by the military regime also does not ensure the representation of women in any branches of the government.

The incidents of exploitation and violence against women are drastically increasing in Mon areas. The Burmese military government has applied a "divide and rule" policy, employing various kinds of strategies to repress ethnic nationalities. Sadly, a principal strategy used is the sexual violence against ethnic women. It is considered to be part of the "Ethnic Cleansing Policy", where the government carries out "mixing blood" campaigns, by raping ethnic women or forcing them into marriages with Burmese soldiers. Rape and sexual abuses committed by Burmese troops against Mon, Shan, and Karen ethnic women have been widely reported, and yet have been permitted to continue. Only adding to the problems of women is the extreme economic hardship in the country. Regretfully, in search of a better life many women have fallen prey to human traffickers and are being forced into prostitution. Those victims have no place to turn for protection as the police and military are highly corrupt, siding with perpetrators.

Recently, Burmese military dictators formed a new civilian government following their claimed election results. Nonetheless, the change in government is just in name and the supreme power remains in the hands of military Generals. Social, economic, and political situations in Burma continue to deteriorate. We do not believe the new puppet government will be able to bring a solution to political conflicts in the country. Only through dialogue among the Burmese military, democratic forces, and ethnic nationalities can Burma's political problems be solved, bringing national reconciliation, ultimately achieving social and economic security for women in Burma. Therefore,

We appeal to the international community to:

- Pressure the Burmese military and new Burmese government to enter into meaningful dialogue for national reconciliation,
- We call for the new Burmese government to:
- Take significant actions to protect women against all acts of violence and discrimination and stop human trafficking and forced prostitution in Mon areas,
- End the policy of "mixing blood" and the Burmese ethnic chauvinism,
- Eliminate "divide and rule" policy and enter into meaningful dialogue with all the opposition parties for national reconciliation,

- Ensure that the law provides an equal access to education and training for women and girls,
- We strongly urge Mon political parties and civil societies to:
- Create opportunities to empower Mon women and foster women's active participations in decision making processes,
- Make every effort to end all forms violence and discrimination against women in Mon areas.

This statement is jointly issued by:

1. Mon Women's Organization (Librated Area)
2. Mon Youth Progressive Organization
3. Mon Woman and Child Rights Project (Southern-Burma)
4. Mon Women's Organization (Sangklaburi, Thailand)
5. Mon Relief and Development Committee (Sangklaburi, Thailand)
6. Mon Women Refugee Organization (Malaysia)
7. Mon Women Organization (Canada)
8. Mon Women's Association of America
9. Overseas Mon Women Organization (Mae Sot)

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