



Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

APWLD NGO on the Roster in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Oral Intervention on Violence against Women

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Chair,

There has been a strong trend in the region for States to adopt militarized responses to counter legitimate demands of the people. We have seen this in Burma, Mindanao-Philippines, Aceh-Indonesia, and Thailand. In this context, women have become more vulnerable to violence, especially in militarised areas and as displaced persons, asylum seekers in transit and receiving countries. The increased militarisation has been supported by increased allocations in national budgets for expenditure on health and education for women.

Chair, I would like to draw your attention to the situation of ethnic Shan women in Burma. Burma's military dictatorship claimed at the General Assembly Special Session on the Beijing Platform for Action in 2000, that Burma "has been in peace for decades" and that "very few cases exist regarding violence against women".

In reality, the civil war between the central government and ethnic resistance movements, which began in 1948, has been continuing till this day. In this war, ethnic women have been targets of systematic sexual violence, which is an integral part of its strategy to subjugate Burma's peoples, and to control and exploit the resource-rich ethnic states.

In June 2002, the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) and Shan Human Rights Foundation jointly released a report "*Licence to Rape,*" which documents 173 incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, involving 625 girls and women. These were committed by Burmese troops in Shan State, from



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1996 to 2001. The majority of rape incidents were committed in the areas of Central Shan State where over 300,000 villagers have been forcibly relocated from their homes as part of an anti-insurgency campaign. Although "*Licence to Rape*" only documents incidents of sexual violence committed by the regime's military in Shan State, other reports indicate that such sexual violence is continuing to occur in all of Burma's ethnic areas.

Chair, since the publication of "*Licence to Rape*", the Burmese military has repeatedly refuted its complicity in acts of rape by military personnel. The State for Peace and Development Council (SPDC) invited Prof. Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, in December 2002 and the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in January 2003 to assess the situation. We understand from local reports that before each visit the SPDC authorities went to the area and intimidated witnesses and survivors so that no one would dare testify against them. In February 2003, local military officers threatened to cut out the tongues and slit the throats of villagers who had dared speak to the ICRC. Further, during the ICRC visit, on January 30, 2003, only a few miles away from where the ICRC team was visiting, SPDC troops gang raped a 35-year-old Shan woman in front of her four children.

Chair, we are deeply concerned about the situation of ethnic women under the current military regime. We are also concerned that the recent monitoring visits by UN and other agencies inside ethnic areas have further endangered women survivors and their communities. It is urgently needed for the UN and other bodies to stop the ongoing systematic sexual violence against ethnic women.

It is very clear that the **system of military dictatorship in Burma** is the **root cause** of the widespread sexual violence against ethnic Shan women. We believe that only genuine peace and democracy in Burma can protect ethnic women from state violence.



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Therefore, we urge States to -

: Raise their concerns with the Burmese military regime about their systematic use of rape as a weapon of war against ethnic women;

: Pressure the regime to immediately withdraw their troops from ethnic states, implement a nationwide ceasefire and begin tripartite dialogue with the representatives of the Burman and non-Burman democratic opposition;

: Ensure the safety and security of women rape survivors and their communities inside Burma, as well as those who have fled to neighboring countries;

: Provide protection those involved in the documentation of sexual violence and the authors of "Licence to Rape"; and

: Stop aid to Burma through the regime, and all investment in Burma until there is irreversible democratic reforms.

Furthermore, we urge States to:

: Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to the Convention;

: Provide access to women refugees and asylum seekers to State asylum; and assist the UN High Commission for Refugees and immigration units to process refugee status and where appropriate settlement for women asylum seekers; and

: Prevent situations of armed conflict within countries and between countries, through open dialogue and peaceful mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Thank you.

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