



## **Statement from the Shan Women's Action Network On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women 2017**

25 November 2017

On this day of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) urges the Government of Myanmar (GOM) to comply with their obligation to Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which calls for providing women and girls with equal access to education. SWAN also calls on the Tatmadaw to cease decade-long armed conflict in Shan State and other ethnic states, which hinders access to education for women and girls.

Access to education is a fundamental human right and yet active conflict reinforces attitudes that lead to girls dropping out of school early to fulfill domestic duties. School attendance reflects the presence of armed actors, which has proven to be a deterrent in accessing education for girls. Fears of unpredictable forms of violence breaking out on their way to school makes families less likely to prioritize the education of their daughters.

The current curriculum is gender biased and comprised of sexist materials and learning frameworks. Furthermore, there are additional barriers holding ethnic people back from accessing education as can be seen by the GOM's lack of effort to address interrelated issues affecting ethnic areas. The compulsory language of instruction at school, particularly at the primary level is Burmese, which discriminates against ethnic people and increases the likelihood of girls dropping out of school.

Gaps in learning are reinforced by an active military presence. Women and young girls are subject to sexual violence in armed conflict. Article 343 of the 2008 Constitution gives the military impunity, granting them complete jurisdiction over all military matters – including disciplining those who commit conflict related sexual violence. As a result, the women are reluctant to speak out against the

atrocities taking place against them and face pressures that lead to them dropping out of school.

Refugees from Shan State have continued to flee their homes due to ongoing conflict, where many settle in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps along the Thai-Shan border and in Northern Thailand. Educational support is overlooked as international donors reduce funding to the border. Cultural norms suggest that access to education becomes less relevant for young women and girls when there are fewer opportunities present.

Under the theme of the 16-Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, access to education for young women and girls must be prioritized not just today – but every day. As such, SWAN is calling on the GOM to drastically increase spending so at least 20% of GDP is spent on education. Funds must also be allocated to ensure ethnic children can access quality education and for ethnic languages in Shan State to be taught during school hours. Support for ethnic language teachers should be increased to maintain their identities.

Moreover, the GOM should take measures to increase the safety of girls attending school in Shan State. SWAN calls on the immediate end of armed conflict in Shan State and other ethnic areas.

Finally, we call on the GOM to implement the recommendations as put forth by the CEDAW Committee, in the Concluding Observations –specifically on education and women in conflict.

Burma [signed](#) onto CEDAW on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1997 and was reviewed by the CEDAW committee in 2000, 2008, and 2016.

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*For Burmese, English, Thai & Shan Language*

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