

# THE VOICE UP

THE NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON CURRENT ISSUES OF EMPOWERMENT, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, AND ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM SOUTHERN MYANMAR.

PUBLISHED BY THE WOMAN AND CHILD RIGHTS PROJECT, HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION OF MONLAND.

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## MOULMEIN INTERNATIONAL PEACE DAY CELEBRATIONS CALL FOR GREATER INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN BURMA'S PEACE PROCESS



September 28, 2015

**WCRP:** This Monday, CBO workers celebrated International Peace Day place at a Buddhist monastery in Moulmein, Mon State's capital city. In particular, the International Peace Day event foregrounded calls for a wider role for women in Burma's nationwide peace process.

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## OVER 100 STUDENTS HOSPITALIZED BY CONTAMINATED WATER



September 28, 2015

**WCRP:** Reports have emerged that over 100 students in Karen State have been hospitalized after drinking contaminated water from a local river

On September 23, over 100 students from Ta Yat Taw school in Karen State's Kawkareik Township, became sick after drinking water from the nearby Jaïne river.

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## Publisher's Message

On November 8, 2015, millions of citizens across Burma voted in the most democratic election the country had seen for at least 25 years. With the landslide victory of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), many Burmese citizens across the world have found new hope that the country will begin to see a freer, more democratic future.

WCRP shares these feelings of optimism, in particular towards the future of women and child rights in Mon communities. As articles in this issue show, the election itself represented various successes in terms of Mon women's participation in politics. Most significantly, 19 Mon female politicians competed as election candidates, across all three Mon political parties. In addition, large numbers of Mon women turned out on polling day to exercise their right to vote. Meanwhile, women's empowerment and civic education trainings have become a regular occurrence in the Mon community.

Yet, articles in this issue also evidence the vast challenges that lie ahead for the incoming NLD

government in terms of ethnic women and children's rights. The NLD will be expected to address the calls of numerous ethnic activists demanding a more prominent place for women in the nationwide peace process. The NLD will also face the challenge of improving justice mechanisms for victims of sexual assault, so that survivors can be guaranteed that their cases will be handled swiftly and with due diligence, and that perpetrators will be brought to justice.

Further to this, the incoming NLD government will face the weighty task of deciding how best to take action to improve the lives and prospects of Burma's ethnic minority children. Articles in this issue of *Voice Up!* evidence the numerous threats that currently exist to Mon children's wellbeing and safety, which range from kidnapping and drug abuse, to health epidemics; in the past six months WCRP has documented over 100 Mon children hospitalized due to unclean food, poor sanitation, infected water supplies and mosquito-borne diseases. These are preventable problems, and the NLD will be expected to show commitment to improving these conditions.

Finally, the NLD will face the challenge of improving education structures in rural ethnic areas of the country.

Following up on WCRP's 2015 report *Inaccessible and Under-Resourced*, this issue contains articles discussing education in Mon areas, outlining problems faced by the Mon National School system, such as prolific dropout and resource concerns. There is exciting potential here for improvement, in that these problems could be resolved should the incoming government commit to working in partnership with the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) to support the Mon National School system.

Following elections in November 2015, the NLD will enter office this year with the weight of expectation on their shoulders and with significant challenges to be faced. However, WCRP remains hopeful that the incoming government will succeed in living up to their election slogan of 'Time for Change', constituting a clear break from the actions of past regimes. Most significantly, we are optimistic that the inauguration of the incoming NLD government will represent a clear opportunity for Mon women and children, enabling them to see real hope for a future in which their fundamental rights are fulfilled.



News

# OVER 100 STUDENTS HOSPITALIZED BY CONTAMINATED WATER

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September 28, 2015



**WCRP:** Reports have emerged that over 100 students in Karen State have been hospitalized after drinking contaminated water from a local river

On September 23, over 100 students from Ta Yat Taw school in Karen State’s Kawkareik Township, became sick after drinking water from the nearby Jaine river. Reportedly, local teenagers had contaminated the water with poison in

order to kill nearby fish and birds, hoping to sell the dead animals at market. However, with students at the school drinking directly from the river, this move quickly led to a sudden outbreak of ill health.

Before school started on Wednesday, 100 of a total 300 students began complaining of severe dizziness and nausea. Teachers in the school acted

quickly, immediately transferring students to the nearest hospital for treatment.

Nai Aie Non, a health worker in Ta Yat Taw village, explained, “The students started drinking the water at around 8 a.m. By around 9 a.m. they started to get sick and the teacher decided to send them to hospital [...] This is the first time that something like this has happened in this village”.

While the outbreak was severe, it is reported that many of the students have recovered quickly and will soon be able to leave hospital. Nai Aie Non continued, “Now, the situation is better, but the doctors are still checking on the students”.

A parent of a Grade 9 student elaborated, “After [my son] drank the water at school he felt dizzy and had stomach pain. His teacher took him to hospital and after we heard about this we went to hospital to see him [...] His condition is improving. We are waiting to go back home”.



News

# HIGH DRUG USE AMONG MOULMEIN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, SAYS DRUGS TASK FORCE LEADER

September 23, 2015



production, symptoms shown by drug users, disadvantages of drug use and possible ways of protecting youth against drug addiction.

According to Nai Htan Ma Nar, many students have experimented recently with a drug called “WY”, a popular type of methamphetamine. He detailed, “In [Burma], people began to know about the WY drug in 1996, but now it has spread across almost all of the country. We can’t imagine how it will spread in the future”.

He detailed strategies in place to combat drug use, including biannual discussions at Moulmein University on the issue, specialized hospital units for drug addicts and CBO anti-drug programmes.

At the end of his lecture, Nai Htan Ma Nar answered questions from youth forum participants.

Finally, he concluded, “Everybody should take notice of this drug problem and try to preserve themselves”.

Nationally, Burma is the second largest producer of opium in the world and also produces a considerable quota of Southeast Asia’s methamphetamines. While many of these drugs are produced for export, drug use remains a significant issue throughout the country.

A section leader from a Moulmein anti-drugs task force has pointed to high drug use among students at Moulmein University.

Nai Htan Ma Nar, deputy commander of the task force, discussed his experiences during a public lecture for the United Nationalities Youth Forum (UNYF), held on September 19 at Dar Du Mar Lar monastery in the Say Cho quarter of Moulmein city.

At the lecture, attended by around 50 young people from across Mon State,

Nai Htan Ma Nar pointed to a high prevalence of drug use among Moulmein University students. He explained, “On September 18 we arrested six students in Myin Thar Yar [a city quarter of Moulmein that is close to the university] who had used drugs. According to a student in this group, almost all of the male students in Moulmein University, two in three, have experienced drug use”.

In his lecture, Nai Htan Ma Nar discussed different kinds of drugs available in Burma, levels of drug



## News

# MON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION HIGH ON THE AGENDA IN RUN-UP TO NATIONAL ELECTIONS



September 15, 2015

WCRP: As November's nationwide polls approach, promising developments indicate a widening space for women's participation in Mon region politics. In particular, more female candidates than ever will compete under Mon political parties in this year's general election, according to information released by the Union Election Commission (UEC).

In total, 19 female politicians have been registered as candidates for the three major Mon political parties. Four women will stand as candidates for the Women's Party (Mon), five for the All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMDP) and 10 for the Mon National Party (MNP). These candidates will compete for election in areas across Mon and Karen States, and in Tenasserim Division.

According to UEC figures, female Mon political party candidates will compete for five seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives), 11 seats in the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities) and 3 seats in Mon State Parliament.

These positive moves mirror a broader trend towards greater political participation for women in the region, whereby almost 20 per cent of all confirmed candidates in Mon State – across 18 parties standing for election – are women.

Mi Nyunt Ye (also known as Mi Jondell Non), a female MNP candidate competing in Kyaikmayaw Township, explained her party's targeted efforts to field a significant number of female candidates. According to Mi Nyunt Ye, "[The MNP] supports women's involvement [in politics]. Therefore, when they organised the candidate list they made a special attempt to include female candidates".

Mi Nyunt Ye explained that her personal goals in standing for election are to encourage women to become involved in politics, to increase the number of

female candidates and to fight for equal rights for women. She detailed, "I think women should be involved in politics, so I decided to compete in the election".

Mi Lawi Han, a female AMDP candidate competing in No. 2 Constituency of Ye Township, described similar motivations. She explained, "In my opinion, even though there are many women involved in Mon community based organizations, [Mon] women's involvement in politics is not satisfactory. So I have decided to compete in the election, in order to urge and encourage Mon women to become involved in politics."

As the potential for female participation in Mon region politics rises, Mon community-based organisations (CBOs) have taken action to ensure that an increased number of female candidates is mirrored by high voter turnout among Mon women.

Together, the Mon Women's Organization (MWO), Women's Empowerment Project (WEP), Mon Youth Educator Organization (MYEO), Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO) and Mon Area Social Development Network (MSDN) hope to organize around 20 voter education trainings, to be targeted mainly towards Mon women.

Mi Ah More Chan, Training Coordinator for WEP, explained, "Our trainings are specifically targeted at female populations in rural areas. We educate them about how to cast their votes. We mostly focus on [the difference between] invalid and valid ballots. We tell them how to stamp their ballots to make them valid. We also explain to them why they must vote in the election".

Burma's national elections will be held on November 8 of this year. In Mon State alone 18 political parties are set to stand, fielding 286 candidates.

## News

# MUDON TOWNSHIP RAPIST ORDERED TO PAY COMPENSATION TO HIS 17-YEAR-OLD NIECE

September 9, 2015

WCRP, Mudon: A Village Administrator in Mudon Township has ordered a 30-year-old man to pay compensation to his 17-year-old niece, after her parents reported to village authorities that her uncle had raped her.

At the time of the rape, Mi K— lived with her grandmother and uncle in Bal Do Village, Mudon Township, Mon State. According to Mi K—, her uncle raped her last year while his wife was pregnant.

Three months later, Mi K— began to show signs of pregnancy. Mi K—’s grandmother took her to see a village midwife and nurse, both of whom

confirmed that Mi K— was pregnant. After staying silent for months, Mi K— revealed to the nurse that her uncle had raped her. Allegedly, Mi K—’s uncle threatened that he would kill her if she told anyone about the rape.

Despite her grandmother’s wishes, the nurse who examined Mi K— immediately contacted her parents, who work in Thailand, to inform them of the rape. Mi K—’s parents returned to Bal Do in January 2015, reporting the rape to the Village Administrator and seeking an abortion for Mi K—.

A Bal Do villager explained, “Once [Mi K—’s] mother knew that she was pregnant, she asked her to have an

abortion as she was worried for her daughter”.

After deliberation, the Village Administrator ordered Mi K—’s uncle to pay her 1,300,000 Kyat in compensation. Both parties agreed and the case was concluded. Shortly afterwards, Mi K—’s uncle moved to Thailand, along with his wife and children.

Mi K—’s case is not the first of its kind in Bal Do. In 2008 reports emerged that a 12-year-old girl from Bal Do had been raped by her 24-year-old brother.

## NMSP INVESTIGATE GU BAO RAPE CASE

November 17, 2015

**WCRP:** The New Mon State Party (NMSP) is investigating a rape case in the Thai-Burma border village of Gu Bao, following the rape of a 22-year-old mentally disabled girl by her stepfather this September.

Over the course of September Ma— was raped by stepfather, 56-year-old U Sein Aung, a total of seven times: on six occasions during the day while her siblings were at school, and once on the night of September 19.

The rapes took place after Ma—’s mother fled the family house, leaving Ma— and her three sisters with U Sein Aung.

Ma— said, “While my three sisters and I were sleeping in the bedroom he came into the room and raped me,

threatening, ‘I’ll sleep with you instead of your mother’”.

A member of a women’s group in Gu Bao Village reported that the group had previously raised concerns about Ma— - continuing to live with her stepfather after her mother left the family home. While the group had recommended Ma— be removed to a safe place, U Sein Aung promised to take good care of her.

The women’s group member explained, “The women’s group in the village told the stepfather that he and his stepdaughter shouldn’t live together. He was told that she should be kept in a safe place, but he didn’t agree and promised to take good care of her. On August 9, an agreement was signed to this effect at the village administrator’s house, with the women’s group present as witnesses.”

Unfortunately, U Sein Aung quickly forgot this agreement, leading to the events of September.

Eventually, on September 21 Ma— alerted her sister in Thailand about U Sein Aung’s abuse, who phoned the village women’s group to report the incident. The group quickly contacted the village administrator, who transferred the case to the NMSP Township office in Japanese Well.

The NMSP is now investigating the reports. If the case stands to scrutiny the NMSP has promised that swift action will be taken. NMSP administrator Nai Tala Rot explained, “We need to check the case first. If he really committed the rape, then the case will be transferred to the highest level of administration in the New Mon State Party.”

## News

# OVERLAPPING AUTHORITY PREVENTS JUSTICE IN THREE PAGODAS PASS RAPE CASE



October 7, 2015

**WCRP:** Overlapping authority is likely to blame for the poor handling of a recent rape case in the Thai-Burma Border Sub-Township of Three Pagodas Pass. While multiple authorities have been alerted to the case, as of yet no action has been taken to pursue justice for the victim.

On September 29, a 35 years old Mon woman, Mi D—, was raped by two unknown assailants on the site of a brick kiln where she and her husband worked, one mile from Yaw Thit village in Three Pagodas Pass Sub-District.

According to Nai Kyaw Nyunt, owner of the kiln, the two unknown men arrived at the victim's home on the brick kiln site, demanding payment of 50,000 Baht. Afterwards, the assailants threatened Mi D— and her husband with a gun, forcing her husband to flee the house and then raping Mi D—.

Mi D— described the events, "They beat my husband with their gun and they forced him out from the house. When my husband ran to the [nearby] checkpoint to ask for help from the authorities, one of the men took my phone and ran away. The other man raped me. He was drunk and I was scared that he would kill me. He covered his face and I did not dare to look up at him, because he was aiming at me with his gun".

Locals suggest that the rape may be connected to another violent attack committed nearby on the same night, where a truck belonging to two Karen

men was hijacked at gunpoint by two unknown assailants. The hijacking, during which gunfire was heard, took place at the Yaw Thit checkpoint close to the rape site.

A Yaw Thit villager described, "Before the rape happened we heard someone at the checkpoint shoot a gun around ten times and we heard someone hijack the truck. We did not dare to go and look because it was midnight".

While the local police authorities were notified of the rape immediately, they failed to make any clear response to the attack, instead passing responsibility on to local military forces.

Nai Kyaw Nyunt, owner of the kiln, explained, "We went to the police station to report the case. The police asked us to go to the military. We also went to report the case to the Village Administrator and the Burmese [government] authorities. But they did not take any action on the case. So, now we have reported the case to the New Mon State Party".

Overall, mixed sources of authority look likely to complicate hopes of justice for the victim, making it unclear who

is responsible for resolving the case. In Three Pagodas Pass Sub-Township authority is held by an array of actors, including the local government, village administration, police forces, military, militia groups, Border Guard Force (BGF), Karen National Union (KNU), Karen National Army/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC), Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and New Mon State Party (NMSP).

Even should government authorities take action to ensure that the case reaches the courtroom, the victim will need to travel to a court 60 miles away from her home, in Kyainnseiky Town, for the case to be heard. There is no courtroom in Three Pagodas Pass Sub-Township.

Meanwhile, the identity of the attackers remains unknown, with Mi D— able to add only that they spoke fluent Burmese.

*"They beat my husband with their gun and they forced him out from the house. When my husband ran to the [nearby] checkpoint to ask for help from the authorities, one of the men took my phone and ran away. The other man raped me. He was drunk and I was scared that he would kill me. He covered his face and I did not dare to look up at him, because he was aiming at me with his gun."*

## News

# VICTIM'S FAMILY APPEAL AGAINST NMSP RAPE CASE DECISION

July 22, 2015

WCRP: In May 2015, a 24-year-old man from Joehaplu village, in the Thai-Burma border area of Three Pagodas Pass, allegedly beat and raped a 14-year-old girl. Her relatives have since expressed displeasure with the case's handling by Township-level New Mon State Party (NMSP) authorities, who recently decided against a jail sentence for the accused rapist.

On the morning of May 5, 2015, the victim, Mi W–, and her two cousins went to their grandmother's farm to pick vegetables. On their way home, at around 4 pm, the victim and her cousins saw Nai Tai Pakao beside the river. Allegedly, Nai Tai Pakao, who works on a farm neighbouring the girls' grandmother's land, covered his face so as not to be recognised by them. Then, he gripped Mi W– from behind and beat her with a bamboo stick. The victim's cousins successfully fled the scene, though Nai Tai Pakao attempted to grab them as they escaped.

Mi W– described the attack, "He beat me with a bamboo stick and then doused me in water. After that I don't remember anything. When I woke up, I did not see him and there were no clothes on my body. I put on my clothes and went back home".

The perpetrator, Nai Tai Pakao, has been married twice, and currently has a wife and children in Joehaplu Village. According to Mi W–, Nai Tai Pakao had attempted to rape her before. Two years ago, Nai Tai Pakao threatened her with a knife and gun, forcing her to take off her clothes. While Mi W– told her grandmother about the prior assault immediately afterwards, her family were embarrassed about the case and did not report it.

On May 10, Mi W– told her grandmother and aunt about the latest attack. This time, Mi W–'s relatives took her to the New Mon State Party (NMSP)

office in nearby Ga Own Guu Village, to report the assault.

The next morning, officers from the NMSP arrested Nai Tai Pakao. When the NMSP officials from Ga Own Guu questioned Nai Tai Pakao about the attack, he admitted to beating Mi W– and raping her while she was unconscious. However, on 12 May, when the Ga Own Guu authorities transferred the case to the Township-level NMSP office in Palaing Japan Village, Nai Tai Pakao denied that he had attacked Mi W–.

Nai Tai Pakao was detained in Palaing Japan while NMSP officials deliberated the case. In the meantime, Mi W– was assisted by community-based organisation Border Health Initiative (BHI), who took her to a local hospital to be checked for sexually transmitted diseases.

Eventually, in the third week of July, the NMSP authorities ruled that Nai Tai Pakao would not receive a jail sentence, given that it could not be proven that he had raped Mi W–. Instead, they ruled that he would simply have to pay all costs related to the case.

Nai Chan Dein, from the NMSP Township Administration Office in Palaing Japan, explained, "The perpetrator did not admit to the attack. The girl lost consciousness after she was beaten, so we can't be sure if she was raped or not. We can't say if this is a rape case or not".

He continued, "We investigated for around two to three months to find out about this case in detail. In [the NMSP's] opinion, we can't say that this is a rape case because there is no evidence showing that she was raped. When the victim's relatives first came to report the case to us, they just said that she was beaten. They didn't say that it was a rape case".

Mi W–'s relatives have since appealed against the Township-level authorities'

decision, saying that they do not want money from the perpetrator, but instead want to see Nai Tai Pakao receive a yearlong jail sentence. According to the Palaing Japan NMSP office, the victim's family have registered an appeal against the decision to higher-level NMSP authorities.

However, the NMSP office in Palaing Japan maintains that, despite the family's wishes, Nai Tai Pakao cannot be sentenced to a year in jail. According to Nai Chan Dein, "We can't say that it is a rape case because we don't have any evidence. By our laws, even if the perpetrator did commit rape then we can only punish him with six months in jail".

As the dispute continues, the case's prolonged deliberation continues to inflict an emotional toll on Mi W–'s family. U Koe, uncle of Mi W– said, "I want this case to be solved as soon as possible to find out the truth. Even if we are not sure if [Nai Tai Pakao] raped my niece or not, he beat a girl so he should be punished. We don't want any compensation, we just want him to be punished".

*"He beat me with a bamboo stick and then doused me in water. After that I don't remember anything. When I woke up, I did not see him and there were no clothes on my body. I put on my clothes and went back home."*

## News

# ADMINISTRATIVE DELAY PREVENTS TEXTBOOKS FROM REACHING MON NATIONAL SCHOOLS

August 14, 2015



Two months into the new school year, students in Mon National Schools have been left waiting for new textbooks due to administrative delays. UNICEF, who are to provide the textbooks, say that the books cannot be printed until permission is received from the Mon State government.

The new primary school textbooks, fully funded by UNICEF, contain amendments from books used during the previous school year. While the current school year began two months ago, students in Mon National Schools have yet to see any

sign of the updated textbooks. Reportedly, teachers have continued to use old books as they wait for new materials to arrive.

Mi Seik Pon, chairperson of the Thanbyuzayat Township Teachers' Association, explained, "We are still waiting for the textbooks to be printed and we are wondering why the printing has taken so long [...] As the Mon State government has not signed [to give their approval], UNICEF cannot print the textbooks".

According to Mi Seik Pon, UNICEF policy dictates that textbook printing can only begin once UNICEF has received official government permission.

She continued, "We are not sure why the Mon State government has not signed [their approval], but we assume that it is because they haven't got permission yet from the central government".

While concerns remain, it is expected that the delays will be resolved and the textbooks will soon go to print.

Last year, Mon National School textbooks were provided by the Shalom (Nyein) Foundation. With the Shalom Foundation unable to continue provision, UNICEF has stepped in to fill resource gaps.



## News

## NO JUSTICE FOR HANDICAPPED GIRL RAPED IN YE TOWNSHIP

November 17, 2015

**WCRP:** In July 2015 a 23-year-old handicapped girl was raped by a 40-year-old man in Jone Lang village, Ye Township. While the case has been reported to local authorities, no justice has yet been seen for the victim.

In July the handicapped girl, Mi —, went to a farm at around 1 pm to pick durian, without informing her parents. She was followed by the perpetrator, U Sein Win, a married man with two children. When they arrived at the farm, he covered her mouth and raped her, threatening her with a knife.

Mi— had already been raped twice before. At the age of 16 she was raped by a soldier from battalion No. 591 in a nearby forest. In the second case, just last year, the brother of a government worker raped her in her own home. During both previous incidents her parents, who earn a living as daily workers, were away at work. In previous cases the perpetrators were punished and some compensation was offered.

Ten days after the latest incident, Mi— told her parents what had happened. She explained, “I told him that I’d tell my

parents if he raped me, but he said if I told anyone he’d kill me. After he raped me, he cleaned some dirt from my head, and told me to hide in the forest, worried that other people would see me”.

The girl’s parents reported the latest assault to the village administrator, who called on U Sein Win to give his side of the story. U Sein Win denied the rape charge, claiming that he was just asking the girl about picking durian.

Although the case was transferred to the New Mon State Party’s Wal Zin office, Mi—’s mother complained that the authorities didn’t investigate the case, saying, “We reported my daughter’s case at the Wal Zin office two months ago, but I have heard nothing from them”.

She added, “I want the authorities to investigate the case quickly and get to the truth. My daughter is handicapped, and if the authorities don’t do anything, I fear for her security in the future. I just want her to be safe. They should punish the man responsible for his crime. We don’t need compensation; we just want security for our daughter. We have to work daily for our food and can’t look after her all the time”.

## ACUTE DROPOUT AT LAMINE MON NATIONAL SCHOOL

July 29, 2015

The school board committee of Lamine Mon National Middle School, located in Mon State’s Ye Township, has said that the school will continue to function as usual for the 2015-16 school year, despite an unusually high number of dropouts last year. In total, over 50 students dropped out from Lamine Mon National Middle School from 2014-15.

According to teachers at the school, Lamine Mon National Middle School saw an unusually high number of dropouts last year due to poverty, illness, the demands of seasonal rubber tapping and labour migration.

In addition to student dropout, Lamine’s school also experienced problems last year with staff retention. According to the school’s headmistress Mi Nyan Sorn, “As well as the many students who dropped out, eight teachers and one volunteer teacher quit in the 2014 to 2015 school year due to personal problems”.

Abbot Mayda Nonda, also known as Banyar Gru, Managing Director of Lamine’s Mon National Middle School, detailed that the school has received 40 new students for the new school year, compensating for the 50 who left from 2014-15. In total, Lamine’s Mon National Middle School began the 2015-16 school year with 248 students and 12 teachers.

Parents of students attending the school have emphasised that, while a significant number of children dropped out last year, many parents remain committed to furthering their children’s education. A parent of a Grade 9 student said, “I dream for my child to become literate and to be confident in the future. That’s why I will help him with everything I can”.

Lamine’s Mon National Middle School is supported by a combination of Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) funds and donations by local villagers, monks, education support groups and other civil society organisations. Reportedly, all of these groups have supported the school to remain open, despite the significant challenges it has faced over the past year.

## News

# SERIES OF CHILD KIDNAPPINGS TERRORIZES THANBYUZAYAT RESIDENTS

January 5, 2016

Thanbyuzayat residents have been living in fear, after a spate of child kidnappings that has reportedly seen nine children abducted from Mon communities in the area.

Just this Tuesday a group of residents in Kyar Kan Quarter, Thanbyuzayat, were arrested after attempting to apprehend a group of people mistakenly suspected of involvement in the abductions.

According to one local, residents demanded that police arrest the group, threatening that they would kill the suspected kidnappers if the police refused to detain them.

According to Kya Mon Ong, a journalist from the Than Lwin Times, hundreds of local residents armed with sticks and knives gathered and proceeded to chase the suspects.

Kya Mon Ong detailed, "They beat up and tried to capture the group...Child kidnapping has been very big news around Thanbyuzayat lately. Many children have disappeared...[Residents] are angry about the kidnappings. If they

had caught the group they would have beaten them to death".

Local police responded by taking some of the vigilante attackers into custody.

Residents' mistaken suspicions about the group are thought to originate from rumours that eight people from Myitkyina, and of Shan-Chinese descent, were to blame for the recent spate of kidnappings, and were still at large in the area. While the rumours were correct to some degree, they failed to account for the fact that the eight suspect individuals had already been arrested in November in connection to the kidnappings, in Kwan Hlar village and Mudon town.

Local residents spoke out about how the five suspects arrested in Kwan Hlar village were alleged to have been posing as dentists in Yin Don and Kwan Hlar villages, lying in wait by the roadside and approaching unsupervised children, offering them money. They were also reported to have stopped families travelling on motorbikes, offering them dental services.

A local explained, "We were interested in this group because they told the

children, 'Uncles will come again'. People heard about this and we were suspicious about what they were doing. The villagers were waiting for them, waiting to arrest them".

When the group returned to Kwan Hlar, local residents immediately approached three of them to check their identification. When they failed to produce ID, and when their dental credentials came into question after a phone call to Thanbyuzayat hospital, a large group of villagers surrounded the three 'dentists', capturing them and driving them to the NMSP office to the east of Yin Don.

Two of their associates, who fled after seeing the arrests, were also eventually detained by police, after trying to escape to Thanbyuzayat.

All suspects captured by Kwan Hlar villagers remain in custody while the allegations against them are investigated. Meanwhile, families in the area continue to live in fear, with no confirmation that all perpetrators behind the kidnappings have been caught.



## MOULMEIN INTERNATIONAL PEACE DAY CELEBRATIONS CALL FOR GREATER INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN BURMA'S PEACE PROCESS

### News from page no.1



September 28, 2015

**WCRP:** This Monday, CBO workers celebrated International Peace Day place at a Buddhist monastery in Moulmein, Mon State's capital city. In particular, the International Peace Day event foregrounded calls for a wider role for women in Burma's nationwide peace process.

The event, which took place in Zay Kyo quarter, was hosted by the Mon Women's Network (MWN), in partnership with the Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), Women's Empowerment Program (WEP), Mon Women's Organization (MWO), Population Service International (PSI), Zaytanar, and the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC). In total, over 250 people from

CBOs in and around Moulmein attended.

The event specifically focused on the place of women in the country's ongoing peace process. Discussions advocated for a wider role for women in the peace process and in politics more widely.

Mi Cherry Soe from MWN explained, "I believe that peace is very important. If we have peace, we can achieve development and a sense of security. People living in this country cannot live life in peace, especially women in countryside. They suffer from physical and mental violence. That is why I think

women should be included in the peace process".

According to Norwegian People's Aid Surveyor, Mi Non Bloy, "People all around the world want peace. In our country, wars often break out. By marking peace day like this, we hope that it can remind people about those who are still involved in war and send a message about the meaning of peace".

International Peace Day is celebrated on September 21 each year. However, this year is the first time an event of this scale has been organised in Moulmein to celebrate the occasion.



"We always appreciate feedback from our readers. Please feel free to contact our mailing or email address."

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## Woman and Child Rights Project