

THE VOICE 21P

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

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PARENTS STRUGGLING TO PAY FOR EXTRA CLASSES NEEDED TO GRADUATE



May 17, 2018

WCRP: Even before the start of the new school year, middle school and high school students in Mon State start their “tutoring” classes—fee-based extra study sessions before and after their regular classes. Such “cram schools” are common throughout Burma, where school teachers or people from outside the school system charge a fee to teach the same lessons taught during class time. [Read more on page 3 >>](#)

MON WOMEN'S NETWORK TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S VOICE DURING NATIONAL POLITICAL DIALOGUE



April 27, 2018

WCRP: From April 24–25, 2018, the Mon Women’s Forum was held at Dhamma Karmi Monastery, Mawlamyine, Mon State. The Mon Women’s Network (MWN) organized the event in order to record the voices and opinions of Mon women, which they plan to present at the national-level political dialogue on the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in Ye City from May 5–7.

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Publisher's Message

“While the past year has seen gains in Burma’s democratic movement, women and child rights failed to find sufficient support from national interest, allowing abuse and violations of the past to perpetually affect southern Burma’s women and children. Women and child rights remain largely unprotected, while their security remains tenuous. As the central government and ethnic groups continue talks for a nationwide ceasefire and eventual peace, women and their voices are excluded from the process, and local communities continue to experience abuse by government forces, non-state armed groups, as well as local abusers. The women and children of southern Burma continue their daily fight for safety from violence, doing so amidst the near lawlessness of Burma’s war-torn ethnic regions.” Voice Up, (2013).

The above quote from Voice Up, 2013, offers a depressing reminder of Burma’s lack of progress on human rights over the past several years.

Burma’s NLD-led government, into which people’s hopes were poured, has failed since coming to power in 2015 to deliver the promised democratic transition. Instead, human rights abuses have multiplied, most distressingly in the case of the widespread, systematic violence committed by the Burma Military against the Rohingya in Rakhine State, which the NLD has failed to acknowledge.

Burma’s ‘democratic movement’ has regressed in recent years. While space for civil society began to open up after the 2011 reforms, this small progress has more recently gone into reverse. Civil society actors face increasing restrictions on freedom of speech, as the government uses legislation to repress both freedom of the press and freedom of expression online.

Women and child rights continue to be ignored in the national-level discourse, even as abuses multiply. Since March 2017, WCRP has documented 13 cases of sexual violence against children. In July 2018 WCRP will release an update to WCRP’s March 2017 report on the problem of sexual violence against children in Mon areas of southern Burma. In May 2018 Mawlamyine Police Station released statistics showing a year-on-year increase of 42% in cases they received of sexual violence against children in Mon State.

Women and women’s rights are still excluded from the nationwide ceasefire talks. To address this exclusion, the Mon Women’s Network (MWN) organized a Mon Women’s Forum in Mawlamyine in April 2018. The 76 female participants discussed how to promote women’s voices at the national-level political dialogue. The MWN Chairperson, Mi Lawi Han, explained, “Everyone assumes women are not related to political and economic issues. It is nearly impossible for women to be involved in land issues. They can only contribute to some social issues. Women must be involved in the discussion in these four sectors.”

Securing women’s involvement in grassroots politics, not just in leadership, is vital to promoting women’s and child rights in Burma. Mi Jalon Htaw, one of only three female village administrators in Mon State, told WCRP about her campaign to end domestic violence, and how she encourages both men and women to support women’s rights. “Once I became village administrator, women began to come to me and discuss their problems and abuse at the hands of their husbands...As a female village administrator women are more comfortable talking to me about women’s issues.”

The example of Mon women in politics shows how change might be achieved. Daw Myint Myint Wai, lawyer and since 2010 political advisor to the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP), says, “I would like to tell our women that we all have the ability [to work in politics] ...We must put all of our female voices together and ask for our rights. It is difficult to be successful in this if our collective voice is not strong...We must have confidence and help our community as much as we can.”

PARENTS STRUGGLING TO PAY FOR EXTRA CLASSES NEEDED TO GRADUATE

A teacher who also works as a private tutor in Thanbyuzayat Township explained that, *“Every student pays for private classes – even students in first or second grade. But the students who study in sixth (Standard 5), seventh (Standard 6), eighth (Standard 7), ninth (Standard 8), and tenth grade (Standard 9) are taking extra tuition before their school year even starts. Some students stay at home if their private classes are not far from their house but some students are forced to live at their teacher’s house and access regular tuition there. Alternatively if students have relatives in the town where they take tuition then they live with their relatives.”*

Most parents want their children to study in private “cram schools” or take extra tuition classes in order for them to pass their exams. Therefore, parents have to find a place for their children before the start of the school year, even

if they have to spend a lot of money to cover the extra cost.

Daw Moe Khine, a Mudon Township parent said, *“My child’s teacher has not even told us the cost of the tuition fee yet. The teacher will start negotiating later. In addition, for the eighth grade (Standard 7) and ninth grade (Standard 8) students who live at their teacher’s house, they need to pay annually 1,200,000 kyat (\$898.89) to 1,500,000 kyat (\$1,123.61), including food costs. And if you want to live and study at the famous private school hostels where students get the best scores, you need to pay about 3,000,000 kyat (\$2,247.23) per year.”*

Before the school year even starts many parents face difficulties in covering the cost of tuition fees. This is fine for the parents who have money to spend. For the parents who cannot afford the fees,

this is unfortunately reflected in their children’s test results.

“My child is trying really hard in his studies but in this education system you can’t pass exams without taking extra instruction. We couldn’t afford the 1,000,000 kyat (\$749.07) or 2,000,000 kyat (\$1,498.16) per year for the fee. My child is in ninth grade and I have no money to support him to join tenth grade. I’m really sorry about that,” said the parents of a student from Pa Nga village, Thanbyuzayat Township.

All the students in Mon State have to rely on these extra study sessions before and after regular classes. What they study in the class room is very general and both students and parents know they need to take extra tuition to pass their exams. The students have no time to rest, and the parents are forced to worry about the cost.

GROUP CALLS FOR GREATER LEGAL TRAINING FOR VILLAGE ADMINISTRATORS AS KEY TO RULE OF LAW

February 12, 2018

WCRP: On January 12th 2018, the Mon State Rule of Law and Justice Coordination Team (RLJC) held an event in Mawlamyine with local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to identify and discuss the challenges to rule of law in Mon State.

According to many of those who attended, a lack of legal knowledge among village administrators is a primary problem. Village administrators are often the first point of contact for those seeking justice, and poor understanding of legal processes and obligations can be damaging to rule of law.

This is particularly the case for issues of sexual violence. Noting the recent increase in reports of sexual violence against children, Daw Khin Than Htwe, Chair of the Mon State Women and Children Upgrade Committee (MWCUC), explains, *“small problems can become bigger, as most village administrators do not understand about*

laws regarding child rights and violations. It is very important for them to have legal knowledge and to deal with cases properly to get justice for each citizen. The village administrator and their team’s relationship with citizens is very close, therefore they are the first to hear of such cases.”

Many families who do report sexual violence to village administrators report a lack of access to adequate justice. A lawyer from Legal Clinic Myanmar said, *“we have some information and have also seen that in many cases where crimes are committed, the administrator pressures the victim’s family not to go to the police and to instead negotiate [a settlement] at the administration office.”*

Moreover, participants felt that rule of law is also hampered by factors such as corruption in local government departments and staff, particularly among local police departments who process cases, citing a lack of respect for the rights of local people.

“There is no rule of law as staff from the government are corrupt against their own citizens. If we talk about corruption, we have to start talking about people’s spirits. If we could change each staff’s thoughts or spirit, rule of law would automatically be available,” said a male representative from the event.

Participants at the event recommended that the government implement a regional model for solving these challenges, which would see village administrators taking formal legal action against perpetrators.

According to Daw Khin Than Htwe, this comes down to providing better education for village administrators on rule of law. *“The administrators never attend our events, even though Mon State ministers and Members of Parliament accept our invitation and join us. Administrators are the first point of travel on the path to rule of law. I would like to suggest that if the group [RLJC] invites them and provides legal training, they would be more likely to join.”*

MON WOMEN'S NETWORK TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S VOICE DURING NATIONAL POLITICAL DIALOGUE



"All of our women's [groups] can't join the dialogue. In order to present women's voices and opinions [during the dialogue], we have organized this forum," said Mi Lawi Han, chairperson for the MWN.

According to Mi Kon Chan Non, vice chairperson of MWN, politics, social issues, the economy, and land and natural resources were the main topics discussed during the forum, and recommendations by the forum will be

presented either at the national-level political dialogue or the 21st Century Panglong Conference.

"We have to prepare for what we should do [in the future], but we don't know if they'll accept [our recommendations] or not," said Mi Kon Chan Non.

The MWN is promoting women's voices at the national-level political dialogue because it wants to create space for

women to be involved in politics, social issues, economics, and land and national resource sectors, according to Mi Lawi Han.

"Everyone assumes women are not related to political and economic issues. It is nearly impossible for women to be involved in land issues. They can only contribute to some social issues. Women must be involved in the discussion in these four sectors," continued Mi Lawi Han.

"It's traditionally believed that women are not related to politics and their contribution doesn't make a significant change. It's difficult for women because they're asked: 'What have you done before and how much experience do you have?'" said Mi Kon Chan Non.

The MWN urges that not only women but also men encourage more women to have a decision-making role in politics.

Seventy-six female participants from all over Mon State joined the two-day Mon Women's Forum.

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MAN CHARGED WITH RAPE OF 12-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN YE TOWNSHIP

May 24, 2018

On April 24th 2018, a 12-year-old girl from Patamyar Kyout Tan quarter, A Baw village tract, Ye Township, Mon State, was raped by a 19-year-old fisherman. The man was later arrested and charged under Myanmar Penal Code #376 (punishment for rape) and Penal Code #511 (punishment for attempting to commit offences) at the Ye Police Station.

Mi Tin Tin Win, Chairwoman of the Ye Township Mon Women's Network explained, *"The perpetrator is a friend of the girl's brother. He often visits their house. On April 24th, the girl was home alone and sleeping while her mother was at work. The perpetrator came to her house and raped her."*

The perpetrator threatened to kill her if she started shouting. After the incident, she went to her mother's work and told her about it. They went together to the perpetrator's boss' house and reported the case to him.

According to Mi Tin Tin Win, the girl's mother tried to ask the perpetrator about the incident, but he refused to say anything. However, when his boss asked him about it he confessed.

Mi Tin Tin Win added, *"The Mon Women's Network is linked to Marie Stopes International (MSI). MSI sent a medical response team to give her a medical examination. The organization also provided for her legal as well as medical expenses."*

After checking the evidence and receiving the girl's medical report from the hospital, the police from Ye Town reported the case to the Mawlamyine District Court. They charged the perpetrator in May. The young girl is currently studying in grade 4 at primary school in A Baw village. She lives with her widowed mother, who works in the dried fish and shrimp industry.

See HURFOM's 2017 report, Cracks in the Silence, for information about the prevalence of sexual violence against children and the challenges to accessing justice in Mon State and Mon areas of southern Burma.

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FAMILY OF CHILD RAPE VICTIM UPSET AFTER FORGED SIGNATURE CAUSES THEM TO MISS COURT DATE

February 7, 2018

WCRP: The family of a 13-year-old victim of rape from Pa Nga village, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, is upset after learning that they had missed the perpetrator's first court date after the mother's signature was forged on the court attendance list.

Daw Ngo explained, *"we didn't know that the Mawlamyine court called us for the first court date as police from Thanbyuzayat did not tell us about it. When they called us for the second court date I found my forged signature on the attendance list of the first court date. I asked a police officer about the fake signature and told him that I am concerned about signing the paper for the second court date. The police officer said nothing would happen and to just sign for the second court date. So I signed the paper for the second court date attendance list."*

According to Daw Ngo, although her signature was included on the attendance list for the first court date, it was not similar to her handwriting. When she asked a police officer about the forged signature he told her that someone from Pa Nga village had signed. But when Daw Ngo asked Pa Nga

villagers, they told her that someone from the police had signed it.

"They shouldn't be able to do this without telling the victim's family. They should know about trial proceedings. A trial is important because [their presence] is helpful when the court makes a decision on punishment for the perpetrator. Actually, [this incident] can be considered a form of corruption," said Mi Cherry Soe, Project Director at Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organization (JCSDO). She added, *"due to these kinds of problem, citizens don't trust in the rule of law and have little faith in the government's staff as well."*

According to the victim's mother, *"we went to the Thanbyuzayat Police Station to sign the attendance list for the second court date and asked the police officer about the fake signature. The police officer told me that if the court asks about our absence at the first trial, just to tell them that my daughter was sick and we could not attend. I replied that my daughter was fine, but that we did not know about the date of the trial and couldn't join. Then he said we know that, but he requested that if the court asks, to just tell them what he said. But the court asked*

nothing about it and we just stayed quiet."

On November 15th 2017, Daw Ngo's 13-year-old daughter was raped twice by a 58-year-old man. Her daughter had gone to the market to buy snacks and when she passed the perpetrator's house he invited her in to eat a snack in his house where the perpetrator then attacked the girl.

In Burma, individuals face many challenges when accessing justice for sexual violence. Legal fees and transportation costs associated with taking formal legal action in a court of law can be daunting. Furthermore, length of trials can last years, necessitating even greater costs and days off work for families to attend court proceedings. This often leads survivors and their families to settle for compensation arranged through village administration, rather than seek justice through formal legal channels.

For more information on sexual violence against children and challenges to accessing justice in Mon State and Mon areas of southern Burma, see HURFOM's 2017 report: Cracks in the Silence.

ATTEMPTED RAPE OF AN 8-YEAR-OLD IN MUDON TOWNSHIP, MON STATE

March 22, 2018

On March 18th 2018, at approximately 9 am, 62-year-old U Tun Ti from Kwankabee village, attempted to rape an 8-year-old girl named Mi T— who lives in Kwankabee village, Mudon Township, Mon State. The perpetrator was arrested the following day by Kamarwat police.

Police charged the perpetrator under Myanmar Penal Code #376 (punishment for rape) and Penal Code #511 (punishment for attempting to commit offences) at the Kamarwat Police Station. The Officer U Sein Win from Kamarwat Police Station said, *"we have finished our investigation and are*

now waiting for permission from the courts. If it is deemed we have sufficient evidence, we will send him to Mawlamyine court. Currently, the perpetrator is detained at Mawlamyine prison."

Officer U Sein Win explained that, *"on March 18th an 8-year-old girl was staying home alone while her grandmother went to Toman village for work. The perpetrator knew the girl was home alone and he went into the house. Daw Main, who lived near the house of the girl, came to the house, seeing the perpetrator taking off the young girl's clothes and touch her chest. Daw Main shouted and the perpetrator ran away."*

Around 5 pm that evening, the girl's grandmother reported the incident to the Kamarwat Police Station and requested that the police charge the perpetrator.

On the morning of March 19th, Officer U Sein Win and a group of officers arrested the perpetrator in a field five miles from Kwankabee village.

Reports of sexual violence against children have increased in recent years, leading many to call for tougher sentences for offenders. For more information, see HURFOM's, Cracks in the Silence.

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MNEC TO HOLD CONFERENCE TO DRAFT NATIONAL ETHNIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY



February 14, 2018

WCRP: The Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) announced that they will hold a two-day conference in May 2018 to collect data and information on ethnic languages and education around Burma. The MNEC will use this data to draft ethnic language education policies, which they will present to the union government.

The MNEC will invite Karen, Shan, Karenni, and Chin education committees, among others, to participate in the conference and voice opinions and solutions to current problems facing ethnic language education in Burma.

“Our union has a variety of ethnicities and each ethnicity speaks their own language... We [Mon people] have decided to build a federal union in the future and we’ve accepted that we must use our own language. The [union-level]

Ministry of Education has also accepted this concept. But we do not have detailed policies on ethnic languages and education. The [Burma] government doesn’t know how to collect data in order to help us, so they asked us to collect information and draw policies and report back to them,” said Nai Rot Ga Kao, from the MNEC.

The conference is scheduled for the second week of May and the MNEC are currently planning consultation trips to various education organizations to collect data and learn how the different organizations operate. The MNEC will also encourage these committees to have a stronger voice in advocating for government policies on ethnic language education.

The MNEC was founded by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in 1972. They currently have 133 Mon National Schools and 92 mixed-schools which are controlled by both the NMSP and the

government. The MNEC has also appointed 780 school teachers and 59 education officials.

“Our union has a variety of ethnicities and each ethnicity speaks their own language... We [Mon people] have decided to build a federal union in the future and we’ve accepted that we must use our own language. The [union-level] Ministry of Education has also accepted this concept. But we do not have detailed policies on ethnic languages and education. The [Burma] government doesn’t know how to collect data in order to help us, so they asked us to collect information and draw policies and report back to them,

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VILLAGES IN THANBYUZAYAT TOWNSHIP TO REQUEST USE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS FOR MON LANGUAGE SUMMER CLASSES



February 23, 2018

WCRP: Even though the time for Mon language summer classes is approaching, some Mon villages in Thanbyuzayat Township have a shortage of class space and may be unable to provide summer instruction. This has led the Summer Class Committee to submit a request to the

Mon State Ethnic Affairs Committee to provide accommodation, according to the Venerable Monk who leads the Thanbyuzayat Township Mon summer classes.

“Some villages have requested summer classes but they have no vacancies for classrooms. The Ethnic Affairs Committee said to send them the list of

villages that have no space for classes. Now, we have collected the list and sent it to the committee, but we haven’t received a reply yet,” said Venerable Monk Soi La Wun Ta, the Chairperson of the Thanbyuzayat Mon Summer Class.

The majority of villages in Thanbyuzayat Township hold Mon language summer classes each year, however this year about ten villages have asked for help in finding space for holding classes.

“Now, it’s the time for matriculation exams and they’ll reply after the exams. We are thinking of holding Mon summer classes in the government schools. But we have to make a request to the Ethnic Affairs Committee. If they give us the green light, we’ll run our classes in the government schools,” said the Monk.

Mon summer classes usually start right after matriculation exams have finished and are held in Mon monasteries for several months.

ACTIVISTS BLAME POLICE CORRUPTION FOR RISE IN DRUG USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN MON STATE

March 20, 2018

HURFOM: Police corruption and inaction is fueling the drug trade in Mon State, according to activists from Ye Township. They argue this has led to increasing drug use among young people, particularly teenagers and students.

“The police are weak in terms of drug control, and by weak I mean that the police are also [corrupt and] involved in the drug trade,” said an activist from Ye Social Society (YSS).

Rumors of police corruption in the drug trade are fed by stories of close interaction between police officers and drug dealers, and the impunity with which many of the latter seem to operate.

“The villagers often see police going to a [known] drug dealer’s house. We think maybe it is to arrest them or do

something [else]. But they never arrest them. We should find out why drug dealers are never arrested. When an arrest is made, the real drug dealer isn’t caught; it’s only his or her relative that is arrested. We don’t know why. The big fish always escapes. Just small-time dealers and users are caught,” said a resident of Ka Loh Toh village, Mudon Township.

It’s not just police who activists say are not doing enough to curb the sale of drugs in villages. Activists report village administrators, although aware of drug dealers in their communities, are hesitant to arrest individuals in their communities with which they have a personal connection.

“Even though police officials and village administrators have the power [to arrest drug dealers] in accordance with the law, they can’t separate their duty from their personal issues,” continued the activist from YSS.

Locals report that the widespread use of illicit drugs has led to a waning interest in the pursuit of an education among young people, and more criminal and mental health problems in their communities. More needs to be done they say, and not just by police.

“Even though the police hold the primary responsibility for the spread of drugs [in our communities], parents should also control their children. They should closely monitor them,” continued the Ka Loh Toh villager.

In December 2017, it was announced a new committee would be formed to combat drug use in Ye Township through advocating for drug treatment and educational programs. However, some locals have dismissed their efforts, arguing it would be much more effective if instead police arrested large-scale drug traffickers and took them to court.

News

MON NATIONAL SCHOOL SUMMER PROGRAMS FACING A TEACHER AND FUNDING CRISIS



March 19, 2018

Mon National Schools are facing a shortage of teachers for its 70,000 students in its summer program due to a funding crisis, according to Nai Mon Ral Gal, joint secretary of the Mon Literature and Culture Committee.

“Although we must have teachers to teach the students, we have no money to provide a salary for the teachers. It is difficult to get teachers without paying a salary,” he said.

Some townships in Mon State open summer programs for Mon National Schools after the government schools close for the year in March, while some wait to open after the water festival in April. The summer school program operates in 18 townships throughout southern Burma, including all of Mon State and parts of Bago Region.

Nai Mon Ral Gal continued, *“most teachers are monks and we have help from some Mon people who can teach Mon language. We have faced a lot of*

difficulties this year. We have no money to support teacher salaries. We have to ask them to work for free.”

There are about 1,500 students in the Mon summer program in Rehmonnayahta University in Mawlamyine, however the school does not yet have enough teachers for their program, which began on March 5th.

“We need a lot of teachers. We posted online [about our need] and some of our friends and some villages will come and help us... We mainly aim for Mon children from Mawlamyine to learn the Mon language and so we accepted students from standards one to nine,” said A Shin Kaymarsarra, the leader of Mon Summer Program from Rehmonnayahta University.

Mi Own Kyin, a student’s mother from Ning Pring village explained that, *“we are interested in this program because we heard that the program also teaches Mon and English as well. If children can speak English, it is useful for their future and therefore we want them to get English [language training] too.”*

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN MON STATE UP 42% IN 2017

May 1, 2018

WCRP: Reported cases of sexual violence against children in Mon State rose by 42% in 2017, according to statistics from the Mawlamyine Police Station. This follows a trend seen around many parts of Burma, leading to widespread media coverage and public outrage. The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) itself saw an 83% increase in the number of reported cases received in the last 12 months, as well as an 11-fold increase over the last five years.

“Cases of child rape are currently increasing... We have a network in local communities and they inform and send us cases on child sexual abuse. These days we receive child rape cases very often. From December [2017] to April 2018, we received about 20 rape cases and half of those involved children,”

said Daw Khin Than Htwe, from the Mon Women and Children Upgrade Committee (MWCUC).

Sexual violence against children in Burma has become an increasingly visible and controversial issue over the last several years. Just over a year ago, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) released Cracks in the Silence, which explored the significant increase in the number of reported cases of sexual violence against children in Mon State, and the challenges to accessing justice in Burma’s complex pluralistic legal system.

The report followed a surge in the number of reported cases of sexual violence against children in Burma, with official police statistics noting cases of such violence rising from 43% to 61% of all reported rapes in Burma. This upward trend only continued throughout 2017,

according to statistics released in February by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

However, it is likely that the number of actual cases is much higher than reported, as traditional beliefs and the surrounding stigma of sexual violence lead many to remain silent. This is also compounded by the lack of faith in formal legal systems among ethnic minorities, leading to a reliance on customary law at the village level.

“The biggest challenge is village administrators using customary law to solve rape cases in villages. For example, we have heard of rape cases in villages where the village administrator asks the victim to agree to marry the perpetrator, and if both of them agree, they sign a marriage certificate and the case is finished. Sometimes, they negotiate with both sides and finish the



International Women's Day 2018 Statement



International Women's Day
8-3-18

March 8, 2018

Today, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) is celebrating International Women's Day. This year's theme is 'Press For Progress' to help accelerate gender parity. While women in Burma/Myanmar continue to face obstacles to the full realization of their rights, there are many women who are playing important roles in pushing for change.

In recognition of their tremendous efforts, HURFOM spoke with four female trailblazers in Mon communities about the challenges they face and their advice for younger generations in Mon State who want to make a difference.

Daw Khine Khine Lei

Daw Khine Khine Lei is one of five female Members of Parliament (MP) in the Mon State Hluttaw. She represents Thaton Township (1) and during her time as an MP she has served as a member of the legislative committee and chairperson of the Mon State Hluttaw's Women and Child Right's Committee.

Daw Khine Khine Lei has long worked at promoting and protecting woman and child rights, beginning with her work with Kachin refugee women and children in 2007.

For Daw Khine Khine Lei, violence, particularly sexual violence, is one of the biggest problems facing women in Burma/Myanmar today. She advocates tirelessly for increased education and awareness of women's rights, as well as a stronger legal framework to deal with perpetrators of violence against women.

"Most women feel ashamed if someone sexually harasses or abuses them. They don't dare to talk about it...society says that it is a woman's fault if it happens. But in this situation women have two choices: you can stay quiet or you can know your rights and fight for them."

Mi Jalon Htaw

Mi Jalon Htaw is one of only three female village administrators in Mon State and the first female administrator in her own community of Tara Nar village, Kyaikmayaw Township. After assuming the position in 2016, she reported facing many challenges and instances of discrimination due to her gender. However, she has never given up and continues to campaign for an end to domestic violence and encourages both men and women to support women's rights.

"Women in our community face a lot of domestic violence. Many rural women do not see domestic violence as a big problem and think it is normal...once I became village administrator, women began to come to me and discuss their problems and abuse at the hands of their husbands...As a female village administrator women are more comfortable talking to me about women issues."

For Mi Jalon Htaw, just asking for women's rights is not enough. She asks that all women learn about their rights and have the confidence to fully participate in the development of their communities.

Daw Myint Myint Wai

Daw Myint Myint Wai has been a political advisor to the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) since 2010 and practiced law in Mon State for 14 years prior to her work with AMRDP.

Daw Myint Myint Wai advocates for the inclusion of more women in Mon politics and the end to traditional beliefs that a women's only role is to take care of her family. She hopes one day to see a federal union in Burma/

Myanmar where women occupy important decision making positions and work on developing policy related to women's issues.

She believes the key to getting more women into politics is changing both men's and women's attitudes towards female participation in politics. Both men and women need to encourage female candidates to participate in Mon politics.

"I would like to tell our women that we all have the ability [to work in politics] ...We must put all of our female voices together and ask for our rights. It is difficult to be successful in this if our collective voice is not strong...We must have confidence and help our community as much as we can."

Daw Ni Ni Aung

Daw Ni Ni Aung is one of only three female village administrators currently serving in Mon State. Prior to assuming the position of village administrator of Kaw Don village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Daw Ni Ni Aung was involved in community development activities throughout the Pyar Taung region.

While working as a community advocate, Daw Ni Ni Aung was struck by the difficulties local villagers faced on a daily basis and the lack of action by village administrators to improve circumstances. Feeling compelled to run in order to make a difference in the lives of her neighbours through community development, she announced her candidacy and won.

It hasn't always been easy since she took over as village administrator. She reports experiencing discrimination against her age and gender by some members of her community, particularly elders.

"Some people look down to me as I am female and young...but I campaign for women and their rights, and educate others on the problems that our women currently face...I would like to say to our women that we have the same ability as men and we can work in any situation that they can work."

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12-YEAR-OLD DOMESTIC WORKER RAPED REPEATEDLY IN CHAUNGZONE TOWNSHIP

March 29, 2018

During February 2018, a 12-year-old girl from Nee Mote village, Chaungzone, Township, Mon State, reported being raped nine times by married, 26-year-old U Soe Aung, who is the son of the young girl's boss.

The girl lived with her aunt in Nee Mote village, Chaungzone Township. According to a neighbor, her aunt likes to drink alcohol and does not take proper care of the girl. Hearing that the aunt will allow her to go and stay at anybody's place who will care for her, Daw Ma Grot from Ka Law village took the young girl to work in her ex-husband's house as a maid.

"Shortly after, the house owner's son, U Soe Aung, arrived from Thailand. Daw Ma Grot left and went to live at her new husband's house, as her son was often drunk and she was unable to control him. The young girl stayed with the perpetrator's family," said U Aung Tin, Nee Mote village administrator.

One day, the perpetrator asked his wife to go out and buy something he needed. He raped the girl while his wife was away. Over the following days, the

perpetrator raped the girl several more times.

According to Nee Mote village middle school teacher, Daw Myint Aye, *"the perpetrator threatened the girl that if she were to tell anyone about the rape, he would kill her. The girl was afraid, so she did not dare to tell others and continued to stay with the perpetrator's family. Even though the perpetrator's wife knew about the rape, she did not dare confront her husband or tell others as she was very afraid of her husband."*

However, on March 7th 2018, the young girl informed Daw Shine, a neighbor, about the rape when the perpetrator was not at home. Then, Daw Shine, discussed with the middle school teacher Daw Myint Aye and took her to the school to ask her about what had happened.

Teacher Daw Myint Aye added that, *"at first, we did not really believe [her about] the incident, but once we saw the perpetrator come to find the girl in our quarter, we were sure that there must be something happening between the girl and the perpetrator. Then, we reported the case to the village administrator."*

On March 8th 2018, the village administrator, teacher, and the young girl went to the Chaungzone police station and filed a report.

"The perpetrator was arrested by the police from Chaungzone on the day we reported him. He provided a confession and currently, the perpetrator is being detained in Chaungzone police station and waiting to go to court," said the village administrator from Nee Mote village.

However, the perpetrator's mother went to the victim's aunt's house to negotiate a settlement, giving 300,000 kyat (US \$224.22) as compensation. The girl's aunt agreed with the compensation.

"We talked to the girl's aunt once we saw the perpetrator's mother go to the girl's aunt's house, saying: 'you are not thinking of agreeing with the compensation? Don't worry if you don't have money to follow the girl's case, we already have connected you with organizations that can help you,'" said teacher Daw Myint Aye.

Police charged the perpetrator under Myanmar Penal Code #376 (punishment for rape) and Penal Code #511 (punishment for attempting to commit offences) at the Chaungzone Police Station

SECOND CASE OF CHILD RAPE IN A MONTH IN YE TOWNSHIP

May 24, 2018

On May 7th 2018, a 33-year-old man named Maung Naing Oo, from Duya village, Ye Township, in Mon State, was reported to have raped a 12-year-old girl from the same village in Ye Township. The perpetrator has fled from his home.

A police officer from Ye Police Station reported that the perpetrator, who had fled the scene, was charged on May 11th under Burma's Penal Code Article #376 (punishment for rape).

The police officer explained, *"The girl's mother returned from Thailand and reported the incident to the village administrator. The village administrator transferred the case to the Ye Police Station. After we received permission from the girl's mother, we checked her*

medical report. We are currently searching for the perpetrator to arrest him."

The incident happened on May 7th 2018 at around 9 pm, when the 12-year-old girl and her friend went to a light festival in the village. The perpetrator, Maung Naing Oo, came on his motorbike and threatened them with a knife and ordered them to follow him. Once they were out of the village, he stopped his bike, left the girl's friend with the bike, and took the girl to the forest and raped her.

"The girl shouted and called out to her friend when the perpetrator took her, but the perpetrator threatened to kill her friend if she followed them. After he raped the girl, he brought the two of them back to the village and threatened to kill them both if they told anyone

about the incident," said Duya village administrator U Hla Aung Nge.

However, the young girl told her grandmother about the rape once she got home and on May 11th they reported the incident to the village administrator. The young girl is living with her grandmother as her mother is in Thailand. The girl has been taken to Mawlamyine Hospital for a medical examination. Members of the Mon State Hluttaw's Women and Children's Rights Committee and members of the village's informal Mon women's group are supporting the victim.

In a similar case on April 24th 2018, in the same village, a 12-year-old girl was raped by a 19-year-old man who was working in the fishing industry in A Baw village tract, Patamyar Kout Tan quarter, Ye Township, Mon State.

News

MON STUDENTS IN NEED OF EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR UNIVERSITY STUDY



April 19, 2018

According to Mon students from Bop Htaw Education Empowerment Program (BHEEP) —run by the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) — many struggle to find financial support to continue their studies after graduating.

“After finishing our program, we have to serve with the New Mon State Party (NMSP) for two years. During this time, we’re preparing to get into a suitable university. When the university accepts our application, we have to apply for a scholarship program [in order to get funding],” said Mehm Kyae Chan, a Bop

Htaw student from Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township, Karen State.

On April 2nd 2018, the MNEC held a graduation ceremony for BHEEP students at the Nai Shwe Kyin Library in Mawlamyine, Mon State.

“We don’t know if we will win a scholarship or not. I want to continue my studies, but if I can’t get any support for my education it’s impossible to continue,” said Mi Rai Chai, a student from Yin Yel village, southern Ye Township.

BHEEP focuses on teacher training and English language skills for young adults from Mon State, followed by a two-year teaching internship. The program often serves as a bridge for students wishing to attend a foreign university.

“After finishing this program, the students have to choose which departments they want to work for during their internship program. For instance, the NMSP have educational,

administrative, and other departments. During their internship, the students have to find a university and financial support for further study. We also support them to find donors and to develop a network for applying to university,” said Nai Rot Ka Kao, a central committee member from the NMSP.

Due to financial constraints, the Bop Htaw program only accepted 30 students last year and 24 students have already finished their studies. However, the program has been preparing to accept more students in the coming project year, according to Mi Krat Non, Deputy Chief Education Officer of the MNEC.

BHEEP, formerly known as Post Ten Education Program, was established in 2000 by the MNEC under the policy of the NMSP. The program was renamed in the 2004-05 project year. Previously the program was run in Nyi Sar, a NMSP-controlled area, but now operates in Mawlamyine.

FAMILY LEARNS OF DAUGHTER’S RAPE BY MONK OVER SOCIAL MEDIA

May 18, 2018

In August 2017, a 46-year-old monk who was teaching at a Mon Literature summer school in Lawka Thukha Monastery in Kwan Hlar village, Mudon Township in Mon State, repeatedly raped a nine-year-old student who was studying at the school. The monk’s nephew saw his uncle, the monk, rape the girl and he made a video recording which he shared with his friends.

The girl’s grandmother explained that, *“she was raped about ten months ago, but the video started spreading among the children in April. I heard some people say that the girl in the video was my granddaughter. On April 19th, I got some children to show me the video and I saw that the girl was my granddaughter.”*

According to a relative of the girl, the video clip had spread on social media. Apparently after the incident the

perpetrator fled from the village. The relative added that, *“according to the video clip the monk committed the rape systematically. There were five students in the monastery. The monk put on a movie for the others to watch to distract them. Then the monk covered the girl with his robes and raped her. She was raped twice by that monk.”*

After the grandmother saw the video clip, she reported the incident to a monk from Pinekamar village monastery, who is also the chairman of Mudon Township Monk Association. On May 15th 2018, the township Monk Association, the township administrator, the police, and the monks held a meeting to discuss the case.

“This incident has caused a lot of damage to the Buddha. At the meeting, we decided that he cannot be a monk anymore. We haven’t found him yet. We asked village administrators and police

to investigate and help us find him. They will inform us if they have any news about the perpetrator,” said the chairman of the Mudon Township Monk Association.

The girl’s grandmother explained, *“a girl’s life was destroyed. Even if she gets 10 million or 20 million kyat (US \$7412.87 or \$14,825.75) as compensation that cannot make her life any better. We will only be satisfied if the perpetrator is punished for his crime. My granddaughter was not the only girl to be sexually abused by that monk; another girl from the village was also abused by him but no one dares to talk about it as they don’t have evidence.”*

U Myo, a relative of the girl, stated, *“We can’t ask her about the incident because she starts crying as soon as we start talking about it. She won’t answer our questions about it. She seems fine and plays with her friends so long as no one asks her about the rape. She never told us what happened. Before the rape she was fine, but it looks like she has been mentally scarred by what happened.”*

MON YOUTH AND DRUG FORUM RELEASES 6-POINT PLAN TO COMBAT DRUG USE AMONG TEENS



April 20, 2018

A youth and drug forum was held April 2–3, 2018, in Kwan That village, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State. The forum welcomed 153 youth participants and was organized by the Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO) and several local youth groups.

The forum concluded with the release of a six-point plan to raise awareness among young people in Mon communities about the dangers of drug use. The six action points included: 1) provide education on drugs through dhamma talks by monks; 2) encourage the media to increase their coverage of the drug problem to raise awareness; 3) encourage ongoing education on the impact of drug use through village administrators and parents; 4) encourage civil society organizations to

actively promote anti-drug campaigns in their regions; 5) establish a drug prevention and eradication group in Mon communities; and 6) encourage musicians and artists to incorporate anti-drug messages into their work.

“The participants from the forum recommended establishing a drug prevention and eradication group in Mon communities. We agreed to collaborate with other civil society and local youth organizations to implement our program in various Mon populated areas. For MYPO, we have the results of our survey on [youth] drug use [in Mon communities] and we plan to meet with locals to explain our findings,” said Mi Rot Chan, chairman of MYPO.

According to research conducted by MYPO in 2017, the proportion of youth in Mon populated areas who have experimented with illicit drugs is estimated to be: 80%

in Ye Township; 78% in Mudon Township; 77% in Thanbyuzayat Township; 75% in Mawlamyine Township; 72% in Kyaikmayaw Township; 75% in Paung Township; 70% in Bar Ann Township, 70% in Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township; and 70% in Kawkareik Township.

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland’s (HURFOM) own research conducted in 2013 concluded that the approximate rates of youth in these areas experimenting with drugs was significantly lower: 40% in Ye Township; 55% in Mudon Township; 50% in Thanbyuzayat Township; 30% in Mawlamyine Township; 35% in Kyaikmayaw Township; 10% in Paung Township, 30% in Chaungzone Township; 40% in Bar Ann Township; 40% in Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township; and 45% in Kawkareik Township.

However, while MYPO figures seem high, they echo estimated rates of drug use reported by village administrators and youths in these areas during HURFOM’s field research.

Mon populated areas of southeast Burma have seen rates of drug use rapidly increase over the past several decades, in part due to the widespread availability of narcotics and lack of a coordinated response by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Burma government authorities. Recently, activists have pointed to police corruption and inaction over high-level drug traffickers as primary drivers of the drug problem in Mon communities.

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

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