The Republic of Union of Myanmar

National Unity Government

Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs

Announcement (1/2021)

April 29, 2021

Ministry Investigates Sexual Violence in Detention

1. We strongly condemn the serious allegations of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in unlawful detention committed by the military-led State Administrative Council and its security forces. We have received many disturbing reports of women being tortured, verbally and sexually assaulted, severely beaten causing serious injuries, including a case of a woman being raped during an interrogation by the security forces. Some detained women have also reportedly been humiliated in public, forced to dance in the streets to entertain the security forces, while others have been groped and manhandled during arrests. One woman miscarried while in detention as a result of mistreatment.

2. These cases are indicative of the wider pattern of sexual and gender-based violence committed by Myanmar's military that has persisted for years with impunity, particularly against ethnic minority women and girls in armed conflict areas. In 2019, the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IIFFMM) found that the military committed "widespread and systematic" gender-based violence against ethnic communities, employing tactics such as rape, gang rape, sexual slavery and other forced sexual acts against women, girls, boys, men and transgender people. According to the IIFFMM, such violations could amount to crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. The military's use of rape as a weapon of war to terrorize ethnic communities has been widespread and systematic, particularly in ethnic conflict-affected areas, and has been widely documented by the local ethnic women organizations and the international community.

3. We are deeply troubled that the State Administrative Council appears to have set aside the Joint Communiqué that was signed by the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations in 2018. This agreement was adopted under the framework of United Nations Security Council resolution 2106 (2013) and requires Myanmar's military to implement specific time-bound commitments that include the issuance of clear orders through chains of command prohibiting sexual violence and accountability for breaching these orders, as well as timely investigation of alleged abuses.

4. We appeal to the international community to immediately investigate the allegations of widespread sexual and gender-based violence being committed by the military junta so that all perpetrators, regardless of seniority or rank, can be held accountable for their actions. Furthermore, we believe that immediate action is needed to end the ongoing intensification of nationwide attacks against civilians by the military, that includes widespread allegations sexual and gender-based violence. We therefore urge the UN Secretary-General to use his good offices to deter further grave violations from taking place. This could include an official visit to Myanmar by the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar, with the goal of stopping the military terror and violence and securing the safety of the people of Myanmar.

5. We are committed to a zero-tolerance policy for crimes of sexual and gender-based violence, in line with Myanmar's obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, including UN Security Council resolution 1325 and related resolutions, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We call on the UN, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Special Rapporteur on human rights situation in Myanmar, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, and the international community to work with our Ministry to protect the rights of women, youth and children and stop and prevent further violence. We all have a responsibility to hold the perpetrators of such heinous crimes to account and to address the needs of survivors through a survivor-centered approach, including provision of necessary services such as medical care and psychological support. The ministry will continue investigate these allegations and document the incidents in order to bring justice for all victims. Our Ministry stands with the victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and commits to ending violence against women, youth and children and to ensure justice and accountability.

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