

Listen to the voice of women for Peace

Kaw Kaw (Yangon)

Because of the civil war, Karen girl Naw Halay Paw arrived at the refugee camp when she was 5 years old. "If there was no war, I would be outstanding in my education", she told us.

"When we arrived at the refugee camp, we were not allowed to go out. Both internationally and in Burma they do not accept the education standard from the refugee camp. I did not get the opportunity to pursue a degree in Education. I just have to stay with limited chances". Her life was dismantled due to the war in ethnic states.

"Because of war, our family was separated. We ran from our village and after one week, we returned. But we cannot work in cultivation, which is our main survival, anymore. My father was arrested to work as a porter for months. There have been so many lives paid like this." Naw Halay Paw wished that the war that destroyed their lives would at last come to an end.

"I don't want our generation to suffer the same like we do. I can't forget what has happened to us, so I want this to stop".

There are so many women like Naw Halay Paw who have suffered and become victims of the civil war. Education, health and living standards have declined and many women became the target of human rights violations by armed groups.

Because of the fighting, nothing in life has been certain. Women have been raped and killed and become disabled. Husbands are arbitrarily arrested, imprisoned, forced to work or killed by landmines.

After 60 years of civil war, Burma got a civilian government from 2011. They are currently in the peace making process, but still women are excluded and there is limited space or opportunity for them to voice their interests.

Ma Thandar from Women Democracy and Peace Network said that women are demanding for full participation in the peace processes. "We cannot put aside or exclude women not only from education, health and politics but also the peace process because women have the same capabilities as men. The only difference between men and women is gender. Women can work for the development of our nation,".

At the same time, she also believes that peace means everyone is able to live with safety and happiness. "Everyone in Burma – regardless of their race, and religion – has equality and hope for a Union system. In the village, people simply think that peace is to stop war or fighting. They think ending 60 years of civil war is peace. Along with the peace process, there should be welfare of people, food safety, human safety and peace".

Ko Sit Naing from All Burma Students' Federation Union (ABSFU) said the life of women will be safe and free from hardship only when there is industrial development and peace.

"If our country has industrial development, the life of women will be developed and we will have equality. Women will have safety in life. When women are working in the factory, they can make their own decisions. They can choose their spouses independently. There should be a peace that can guarantee the safety of women. That is why we need to work together for industrial development and peace. If we have these two, women will get their space in leadership roles and equality".

Ko Sit Naing stressed that the current peace process does not have any transparency for the people and women especially. "In our country, the people do not know what the government is doing. Two leaders of both sides are talking and negotiating for peace. If things don't go as their wish, they fight back. If one side or both sides get angry about the process, then the fighting breaks out again. If the government wants peace that's solid and sustainable, they need to strengthen the connection with the people".

The suffering of the people will be end and poverty will decrease if there is peace in the country. Peace can help protect against human rights violations, and pave the way for sustainable development in the country. In order for sustainable peace to be built, it is crucial to include the voices of women, and we need to listen to their feelings. Women's rights activists are saying that women understand the aspect of nourishing peace which is a significant element for building trust.

Mental illness but strong heart and responsibilities for her fatherless children

Kaw Kaw

Ma Aye Chaw was only 16 years old when she was raped by 3 men. She is now 39 years old. She grew up an orphan deserted by her siblings, and the neighbours who accuse her of being mentally ill. She says ***"I do not want to live with my family. I am really afraid of being a problem to them again. I am really afraid of men."***

Ma Aye Chaw tells her story. ***"The girl in the main road told me to go and have a snack (dish of something fried), but she took me so far away. At the same time, three men told us to go with them, and they followed us. After I ate the snack and on the way back home, when we reached the field, they started to rape me"***

Her body is skinny and she has a short hair style. All her front teeth are gone, so you cannot hear her voice clearly when she is talking. Mostly people see her as mentally sick

but she seems very polite when she talks. She makes a living doing laundry, and her daily income is between 1500-2000 kyat (\$1.5 – \$2).

“I felt strange when he pushed and raped me. When I arrived home, my sister beat me and told me that she felt ashamed of me. She told me to abort the child. She beat me when I told her that I cannot have an abortion and that I would give birth to this child. The child was a boy. A policeman adopted him. Now his life is prosperous.”

She was raped when reaching puberty, but she never gave up her life. She give birth to the baby successfully. After that time, men raped her one by one without taking responsibility for her. No one knew or understood her feelings better than herself. ***“My brother-in-law beat me until my skin was red”.***

“After that (the rape) I did not want to live in my house anymore, so I went outside. People called me bad names, and sexually assaulted me. I never feel like that before, I was blamed by other people.” She expresses the feelings that she feels inside her heart.

She cannot protect herself because of her lack of knowledge, and she has no one by her side. Sometimes she shouts when people shout sexual insults at her, and sometimes people thought she consented to the men who raped her.

“I said to the person who committed the sexual assaults, why are you doing this to me? My brother-in-law and my sister beat me, and swear at me. Later on men would come to my home. Even though I told them “I have children, don’t do it” but they did not listen to me” .

As a natural mother, she brings up her three innocent children by doing any work that is available in her community. None of the men who rape her take responsibility and support the children. In their mind, Ma Aye Chaw is a women who follows all men when they ask her to follow them.

"When I was pregnant, I asked (the father) him to take responsibility for the child. But he told me that it was not his child. I did not know that I was pregnant. I felt dizzy and vomited when I washed the cloths. I asked people to do an abortion for me. But they do not do it for me so I needed to give birth to the child."

She had to raise three children until they were grown up as a single mother without having a job. It is very difficult for her to raise three children without having a job. ***"I had to wash people's clothes door to door during my pregnancy. I do not have a chance to eat healthy and nutritious food during my pregnancy. At that time I only received 500 Kyat per day. Other people give me baby clothes when I give birth."***

She wants to wear beautiful clothes as other women wearing do. ***"I have to wear second hand clothes that are given by other people after they have worn them. I want to wear nice clothes and live well."*** Among her three children, she asked the girl child to stay with her. The eldest child lives in a monastery. He brings back food that is left in the monastery for her mother. She is proud of her son for taking care of her.

She says ***"The reason that I do not dare to go outside anymore is because I have a girl child and I am afraid of men who will sexually assault me, I cannot live a stable life."***

"The surrounding people believe that she is crazy and a mentally sick person and has many husbands." Ma War War Kyawn from North-Okkalapa does not think as other people think. She said "People take advantage of her weaknesses as a person with a mental problem. ***"Women are taken advantage of because of their mental problem and their livelihood not going well. Because of these two reasons people ask me to work without paying me fairly. Men take advantage of my mind, for sex, and physical abuse as well. It is unacceptable"***.

"Ma Aye Chaw's parents passed away when she was a child. She

lived with her sister. No one has raised her. Because of this she lives as she wants to." said Ma War War Kyaw. Most people say that she is mentally sick but she has a mother's kind heart. When she was oppressed by most people she does not have a chance to say anything. She lost her right as a woman. It seems to be like she continues her life like as people say". In order for other women's lives to be protected, and not to turn out like Ma Aye Chaw's life we need laws to protect women from sexual assault, and to take strong action against men who break the law. If we can do this, then we can protect other teenager girls from sexual assault.