

# 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.

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## Refugee from Northern Shan State

Cherry and Anna

Looking at children wearing their school uniforms going to school Hkaw Mai says "I really want to go to school. When I am recovered, I will return to school. I will confess before the lord". Hkaw Mai is from Man Kaung village, Mong Paw Township, northern Shan State. But she is currently in Thailand where she came for medical treatment.

When we are talking about Kachin refugees, we know that they are refugees from Kachin State. However, there has been fighting not only in Kachin state but also in northern Shan state where thousands of refugees face grave difficulties.

A teacher who has been living with refugees from Hmai Hai village, Mone Ko Township, on the China-Burma border was trying to arrange for Hkaw Mai to go to school. However, one week before school started Hkaw Mai fell down on a pig food pan. Her whole body is burnt so she could not go to school. She has become a double refugee. She was not accepted at Mansi

hospital in China or a hospital in Yangon so she came to Chiang Mai for treatment for her injuries.

A teacher who is helping her told us that with the help of Kachin Baptist Conventions, the girl was taken to hospital in Mansi city, China and Yangon. But when the doctors checked her wounds, they rejected her for treatment.

“Hkaw Mai did not have any hair even when she arrived in Chiang Mai. Her skin looked scary. Her hands got closer to her upper body and she could not move them anymore. Her head also could not move. Now that her hair is re-grown she looks much better” said a friend.

With great luck, one of the preachers in Chiang Mai helped her get treatment so that her family does not need to worry about her. She is currently still in recovery.

For a 12 year old girl, it is normal to have small breasts as puberty comes but Hkaw Mai will not have grow breasts since her chest was terribly burnt.

“I sympathize with her. She is having her treatment far away from her parents so I am happy that I could help support her,” said the teacher who is taking care of her.

Hkaw Mai did not go to school until she was 12 because she was taking care of her younger brothers, and her mother who has hemiplegia.

“One hand of my mother is not working. My father is opium addict and only interested in finding opium. He does not care about his children. We are very poor and because of that I could not go to school. We had to give away my younger brother for adoption” said Hkaw Mai.

Hkaw Mai mother, who is staying at Mone Ko refugee camp, said they have to run from fighting in northern Shan state along with another family.

"We have 4 children, 1 girl and 3 boys. Among my sons, the eldest had rickets and only lived for 6 months and died. For the youngest boy, when he was only 2 weeks old, I had to give him up for adoption because I did not have enough money to take care of them," said Daw Maram Bu, the mother of Hkaw Mai.

"Now at home, my son is already 6 years old. Last year, we could afford to pay only for one month nursery school fees so he went to school for only one month. This year, his uncle paid his school fee so he can attend. I felt very sad to think about my children's future but I cannot do anything because I am a disabled person. I want my children to be educated, that is why I gave my son for adoption. Now my daughter Hkaw Mai got burnt and is not able to go to school. She is having treatment in other country" said Hkaw Mai's mother, crying.

One of the neighbors said "Her husband does not give any helping hand and the wife cannot do much with only one hand. They both do not have any relatives to help them, so their live are much more difficult".

"Some of the villagers have helped them as much as they could. The adopted parents of their younger son also send them some money. But we do not know how much they get,".

According to U Aung Min, minister of the president office, said there have been about 200 fights in 4 months in Kachin state and Shan state. Most of the fighting happened in Kachin state and the northern part of Shan state. Many people do not know about refugees from northern Shan state and they do not get much attention or humanitarian aid.

Daw Maram Bu said she cannot ensure that Hkaw Mai can go to school after she returns from treatment.

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# Opposing fear or Interview with Naw Ohn Hla

Kachin Girl



“I want people to know that they need to get rid of the shadow of fear. If they show that they are afraid, they will be more intimidated. I want them to know that if they want to go to against this, they can. That is the message we are giving to them and now it is becoming more widespread”.

I was waiting at one of the restaurants to meet with the leader and women’s activist Naw Ohn Hla. It was raining heavily. I have tried to interview her before but she was arrested again. This time, I am determined to interview her so I was waiting at the corner of the restaurant.

Now she has arrived. She is holding a black umbrella. Under the umbrella she was wearing a dress of white material, and she has tied her hair on both sides. She has no make up on her face, but her pure and humble face appears vividly. She is still very active despite being 52 years old. “Because of the heavy rain, it was very crowded on the bus so I am a bit late” she said, explaining her delay. She grabs a chair and sits.

Naw Ohn Hla is from Kone Ka Muu village, Maw Bi Township, Yangon. She got involved in activism during the 8888 uprising and later she became a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD). In 2005, she resigned from the party. Since 2007, she has been actively involved and led prayer campaigns for the release of political prisoners. In 2012, she co-founded the Women’s Democracy and Peace Network.

She has been arrested on and off 17 times and has been imprisoned 7 times. Currently she is on bail after she was

released for praying at Shwe Da Gone pagoda, in Yangon, for the release of political prisoners in 2007.

Naw Ohn Hla started telling her story about how she became a political activist for social welfare workers. Naw Ohn Hla told me “In the past, I worked as social welfare worker. I am a Karen ethnic woman and worked for Karen welfare and ethnic identity. I felt that the dictator of the (BSPP) Burma Socialist People Party had strongly oppressed and treated the people unjustly so I took part in the 8888 uprising. I wanted the people to stop being fearful. If they are afraid, they will be intimidated more. So I want people to take part in the struggle – like we do. That is why we are raising awareness as widely as we can.

**Question: How did you found the Women Democracy and Peace Network?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** “When we founded the network, most of the members were ex-political prisoners, especially those who were together with me in prison. We started with 7 organizing committee members. We did not start as an organization because we wanted to recruit women from different states and divisions. We planned to organize a conference where we would elect the leadership after we had recruited women from different parts of Burma. At the moment, we had around 500 members. We had our first gathering meeting with all members in August 2014 and with everyone consenting, we founded the organization and elected the leadership.

**Question: What have you done since the founding of the DPW?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** “Since DPW was founded, we have helped fight against all injustices. Even though we are a women’s group, we mostly work on land grab cases. Of course we have also helped many women’s cases. At the same time, when we are working on the land grab cases, women are in the forefront – as we have witnessed. As we are women, we have always intended to help women. Among the peasants, there were so many female widows facing severe difficulties after their farmlands were taken

away. As a consequence, land grabbing has created a huge impact on the life of peasants. The problems are huge – such as social problems, health problems, economic problems, including not being able to support their children's education from primary to university level.

I want to share one case about Daw Than Yin from Shin Paung Wae township whose farmlands were grabbed. When her land was taken away, all her plants – like peanut and sesame – were completely destroyed. Because of this she went to work as a tenant farmer – where she was mistreated. As a result, her daughter was not able to enter her 10th grade exam. Since there was no income, they were enduring huge difficulties and pain. We want to help her as much as we can and that is why we are paying for her daughter's school fees. We could not support her much so we helped them connect with monastery education and we pay for her bedding, food, clothing and books.

We also helped in cases to do with domestic workers and underage girls who were forcefully taken as a wives. Ill-treated people do not dare report their cases to the police. Even if they want to report it to the police, they do not have money for all the proceedings, and they also have to hire a lawyer. In this situation, I went to report to the police on their behalf and connected them to lawyers. In Yangon, when land is grabbed, even when men are the breadwinner, it is women who have to take care of the children's food, bedding and education.

Now we have 10 committee members at DPW. We send off younger members for different educational opportunities such as training and internship on Human Rights, Environment, Women's Rights and Adolescent Reproductive Health organized by other organizations. We have organized discussions on current land grab issues and land laws. I am not an expert but I used to be a farmer myself. In the past, we've invited an expert on the issue of land rights and land laws, lawyers and legal experts as a guest speaker. If they could not make it, then I led the



discussion.

**Question: What did you do regarding land grabbing issues?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** Farmers whose land has been grabbed did not know whether it is against the law or not. They also did not know how they can legally respond. In this situation, we provided discussions on "Land Laws". We provide information on how they can respond in a legal way. After they know and understand about the laws, they respond back to the land grabbers. For example – farmers from Shin Paung Wae were very afraid to talk about it in the beginning. Their lands were seized by the arms ammunition factory and they were afraid to report this. Later, when they learned about their rights, they started reporting.

**Question: Is there any success cases of farmers for their demand of the return of their lands?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** Yes, but although there were winning stories it does not mean that they get back their land. There was one winning case. In 1996, the Defence Ministry owned an arms ammunition factory which grabbed more than 120,000 acres from 13 villages in Shin Paung Wae Township, Magway division. The farmers fought their case. The army had confiscated the lands and ordered the farmers to work in the farms. One time, one of the military soldiers opened fire against the tenant farmers and asked for money so the farmers got angry. About 500 farmers came out with a petition and sent it to the President and the International Labour Organisation. The post office has sued U Paw Oo who sent the petition for making false accusations. However, we supported the farmers in this case and at last we won.

Since they have been working to support the issues of women and land grabbing, DPW has been followed and watched by the authorities. Sueing and imprisoning is just a day to day matter for Naw Ohn Hla. Whatever happens to her, she will continue to work for the benefit of the people as much as she can. She is determined to work for the people.

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# **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.

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# Sex Workers Need Empowering

Maw Kaw Kaw

*“I am aware that it is a good income working as a sex worker. I can send back money to my family. I have worked at sea nearly two months.”*

*“My friend told me to follow her. She told me to sell sex to foreigners. And then I asked her – Do the men buy sex from foreigners? She told me that men were carrying things. The women can communicate better than men so women are having to sell sex. When I arrived there, the work was prostitution”* As told by a sex worker who is living with HIV.

Her father passed away when she was a child, and she was left with five siblings. Her father was a soldier. As her father worked in public service, her family had to move from one place to another with her father. Her family did not have a stable place to stay. After her father died their family did not have the ability or the resources to stand on their own.

*“I had to work in construction because of family poverty. I had to carry heavy amounts of soil which was not suitable for my age. The employer told me that if I was not able to carry the soil in a basket, he wouldn't give me work the next day. So I tried to carry the baskets even though they were too heavy for me because I needed a job. If I did not have a job, my family would have nothing to eat. The employer put a lot of wet soil into the basket and asked me to carry it. I had to carry cement until my back broke”* . She tells of the difficulties her family faced and how she tried to help her family out of poverty after her father passed away.

The family had to move out from the house that the military

gave to them after her father died. Her family moved from Shan State to Yangon region. She worked in different factories to support her brothers and sisters education.

***“I got a job in sea food processing factory opened by a Chinese company. It was a pretty good income. But I needed to work day and night. I did not get down time that every human needs, and I did not sleep enough. The important thing was that if I worked overtime I could get more money. At that time, my income was enough for my family, but unfortunately the sea food factory was shut down.”***

She faced difficulties after the sea food factory was shut down so one of her friends told her to go with her and sell produce to the foreigners on the ship. She became a sex worker when her friend lied to her about the ship.

***“I worked on a ship as sex worker. After I knew it was to work as a sex worker, I tried to go back. People told me ‘If you escape, the employer will kick you out into the sea. If you die no one would know it – the police are not here. You will die’. After they told me that, I was afraid to escape, so I started to work as a sex worker”.***

***“It was good income working as sex worker. I can send back money to my family. I was worked as a sex worker nearly two years.”***

“Then my friend contacted me to say that the sea food factory was open again. I went back to the sea food factory and worked there again. When I compare the money that I earn from the sea food factory with money from working as a sex worker, it’s very different. Income from sex work is much better than the factory. And I need to cover four family members daily needs and education.”

***“One day one of my customers told me to stop working as a sex worker. I stayed with him for 8 months. He is a sailor. When he went back to work, I was pregnant. At the time, I was too young so I did not know that I was pregnant. Even though I worked as a sex worker, I did not have any knowledge about that. In my mind I only think, I need to get money”.*** She continued to work as a sex worker when her husband is far away

from. She thought to abort the baby but she was afraid she would be arrested so she did not do it.

***“I did not know about the law. My mother knew that I was working as a prostitute. The police arrested me and I went to jail for a year. My baby was born in the jail.”*** No laws protected her, and she did not have knowledge about how the law worked either. When she was released from prison, her family became split up from each other. She moved to the illegal area and started to sell water glory for her family's daily income. However she cannot out from her family's poverty cycle.

When her child was two years old she was faced with financial difficulties so she went back to life as a sex worker to solve her financial problems. ***“I went to the Myeik to work, that's where I got HIV. I have been taking ARV (HIV Medicine) medicine since 2008. Now, my son attends grade 10. I don't want anything to affect my son's progress,”*** she says explaining her current family, and her surrounding situation.

***“People think that women work as prostitutes and so they get HIV disease. Actually we (sex workers) do not spread these diseases to other people. We have clean bodies without disease, but we get it from our customers. Maybe because we don't know how to use a condom. However, we don't aim to spread it to our partners – they come and spread it to us. Before we didn't know that we could test the blood and so maybe we spread it to other people without knowing because we did not know that we have HIV disease. After we knew it, we never aimed to spread it.”***

For ordinary women, if they were infected with the disease by their husband, they got sympathy from their neighbour and could share their feelings with their neighbour.

***“Sex workers need knowledge awareness, and they need to work to change the way that society sees them,”*** said Ma Mayrry Ah who works at an INGO which is an organisation working with sex workers. ***“Sex working women infected with the disease are not treated the same as ordinary women. The surround neighbours discriminate against them, and blame them. If we look at the***

*reasons for sex workers working in the sex business, 9 out of 10 (9/10) are people who face family financial difficulties. Sex workers are people who struggle with family livelihood, who were orphans, who were trafficked, who worked in domestic work. We try to help them a lot, but if they do not change their capacity will not improve.”*

*“Moreover, if the Myanmar Government pass the Sex Worker Protection law, it will help sex workers, and decrease HIV disease as well. The reason is when sex workers use a condom they can be arrested by the police. Even though the police say that they do not arrest for using a condom, the police arrest the sex worker because they must arrest according to the law. Sex Workers are afraid of this because they are not aware of this attitude so they are arrested by the police. After they are arrested by the police, they stop using condoms even though the police do not arrest them. If they get a right to work transparently and have medical check ups regularly it will be really good for the sex workers. ”*

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## **Hell of the grandmother from Northern Shan State**

Anna

*“Until now, I have not found the reason that they arrested a me, a 62 years old woman, bashed and beat me with a gauntlet. I lost my front two teeth. I still suffer those pains now.”*

*“On 17.11.2011, the military troop KLY (252) arrested Daw Dshwe Yeon during the night time at her home which is located in Northern Shan State, Nant Khan Township, Panlon section” said Daw D’ Shwe Yone.*

She had seven children – five sons and two daughters all of



whom are married. After her children were married she stayed alone in her house in the village on the top of the mountain. She worked making charcoal and doing hillside cultivation to support her children's education.

*"The soldiers arrested five sons and my elder daughter's husband at night at 11.10 pm. They accused my sons of hiding weapons for the Kachin Independent Army (KIA). In the morning at 6 am, they arrested me, all my grandchildren, my daughter who was pregnant, and they locked us up at Nawara Police station (1). In the evening, my grandchildren were starting to cry because they were hungry".*

*"They pointed guns at us and asked us where the weapons were hidden. They locked up my sons in different prison cells. They locked up my family one night and released us in the morning. They threatened us to not let other people know about things that happen with us"* said by Daw D' Shwe Yone.

After I arrived home, the chairman of my village (village headman) told me that we need to sign an order to release my sons. I am very happy so I follow him to Nawara Police Station without finishing my breakfast. They asked me to sign a white piece of blank paper, without any letter inside the paper. After I signed, they locked me up again.

Her neighbours were moved to other places because when they saw her family members arrested and tortured, they feared that the same would happen to them.

*"I said to the militia 'She only takes care of her grandchildren. She did not go anywhere. What kind of mistake has she done that you guys arrest her like this?'"* She was very old. Her sons were not working as KIA soldiers. They often come in and out from my house. I knew everything that they were doing for their livelihood. Not only me but also the chairman of village (village headman) knew it. *'You can also ask the village headman. Why do you guys torture women that are your grandmother's age?'* said U Maung Than's Pastor of Palaung Ethnic.

*"They were threatening me to sign the white paper. I told them 'I cannot sign the white paper without describing anything. I*

*will go back go now, and release my grandmother so she can go back with me. They did not release her. I had to come back alone and unhappy”* said by village headmen.

After that torturous hell started again for the grandmother. They said to her *“Your sons said they give guns to you.”* I had never seen or touched any guns before. I did not tell lies, I told the truth. They struck me with a gauntlet and a stick, and beat me with the gun. I do not remember how many times as I fluttered in and out of consciousness.”

She heard her sons being tortured from the other prison cell. *“I heard my sons being tortured from the other prison cell. I felt pain when I heard my sons’ screams. I asked them to let me stay in the same prison cell with my sons. I told them ‘I will stay with them’.”*

Her sons were tortured in front of her. She said *“They touched my son with electric wire. The blood was collecting on the floor and become a pond, the whole room was full with the smell of the blood until they moved my son to other prison cell. They moved me to another room and tortured me again”*

She asked the people who tortured her to kill her and release her sons.

She continues her story. *“In the morning I regained consciousness. One of the men asked me ‘Don’t you want to go back home?’ I said ‘Yes I do’. He took me out from the prison cell to the back door. He told me ‘Don’t look back, do not go back by the street way, go the jungle way’. I ran into the jungle and went back to my house,”*

When she arrived back at her house, she heard the news that her elder daughter’s husband, her son-in-law was dead.

Later she was arrested again. She was sent to Nah Khan’s police station, and than to the Musel’s township police station. She was accused of contact with a rebel group, and she was sentenced to two years in prison for this reason.

*“Now my elder daughter is left with five childrean. She has to struggle alone.”* Told to Daw D’ Shwe Yone.

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# Escape from the Hell or A story of a girl domestic worker who was brutally abused

Kaw Kaw, Yangon



domestic worker  
who was brutally  
abused

***“They threw hot water at me. They cut my nipple with scissors because I slept during the night. They did not want me to sleep.”*** She said this while she was crying so heavily I hardly heard what she said. She seemed to be afraid of people and she held her head down. She could not answer much of anyone’s questions. It is difficult to predict how deeply she was traumatized by her experience.

15 years old Ma Than Than Aye lost her mother when she was young and she stayed with her father. She has 4 siblings and she is the youngest among them. Her life in hell started 4 years ago when a monk from a monastery in La Ha, North Dagon, Yangon helped her find work as a housemaid through her father. Her father U Htun Thein with a sad face said ***“A monk from that monastery told me that one of his female donors, Daw Aye Aye Win, was in need of a housemaid. She has a granddaughter and took my daughter to her house as a companion for her granddaughter. I allowed my daughter to go because the monk himself guaranteed it. I went to see her only one time in year***

**2014 within 4 to 5 years. At that time, my daughter did not look happy. She told me she wanted to come back. We did not get any wages for her work because the house owner is the female donor of the monk."**

So far, Ma Than Than Aye said she got 10,000 kyat one time and 5,000 (around \$5) for another time only, in 5 years of working as a housemaid. She was tortured after 2 months of her arrival at Daw Ay Aye Win household, who live in Taw Win housing (Dagon), Yangon. She did not get any benefits.

With a very soft voice with head held down she said **"They give me a room at the back of the house where there is nether blanket nor pillow. I had to sleep just like that. They hit my head with steel cooking spoon."** When looking at her head where we can hardly find hairs and saw the scars and some of them were treated but the whole head were full of different kinds of wounds. **"They beat me until it bled. So treated my wounds by putting salt in them."**

7 people live at Daw Aye Aye Win house and among them the 2 women who beat her with chains, steel cooking spoons, and cut her with scissors, her whole body was full with all kinds of wounds and scars. They did not give her any food and furthermore they accused her of stealing food to eat. Because of that they pulled her little finger with pliers. We can see that her little finger is windling.

**"They did not give me any food to eat for a whole week to 10 days. If I told anyone on the outside about this, they said they would ask me to compensate for the things that were broken or destroyed because of me. My hands are numb because they pulled with pliers and from beating. Because of that if I try to hold something, I drop and break things. Even if I tried to escape, they threatened me that everyone in this area is their people."** she said.

One of her teeth was broken because Daw Aye Aye Win son-in-law kicked her in the face. She ran away because she could not bear or endure the abuse. She was not able to see or visit her family for five years. When she ran to the township section leader house and with the help of township section leader, on

July 14, she could get contact with her uncle Ko Myo Oo. Ko Myo Oo said ***"She ran from the 41th section and hid at one of the houses, and the house owner saw her bleeding. They worried about her wound and went to report it to the township section leader. With the contact of the township section leader, she came back to our place and with the help of the section leader, we reported the case to the police after taking her to the hospital"***.

The Township chairperson of the executive committee of National League for Democracy (NLD) of South Dagon, U Nyi Nyi said ***"We filed a complaint with 4 sections of act. Section (325) on Punishment for voluntarily causing grievous hurt, section (354) on Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty, section (506) on Punishment for criminal intimidation and section (294) Obscene acts and songs. The case is charged at North Dagon police station on 20th"***. U Nyi Nyi said if the police ignored this complaint, he will continue to prosecute the case according to the justice law based on the desires and feelings of the survivor herself. ***"We will report to the International Labour Organization. Moreover, we will inform the case to the Ministry of Home Affairs. We will inform to all organizations working with children. Then, there should be a law that will prevent these kinds of cases from happening in the future."***

In Burma, there are similar cases of underage maids being abused in all regions of the country. He continued to explain that ***"We will conduct discussions with international workers association"***. U Nyi Nyi said at the press conference that he will circulate this case to 500 networks within his social networks and as for the press conference so the information will be circulated to 200 networks. ***"We heard that this kind of case happens in 4 different areas. There are many similar cases like this happening to our young girls, where they aren't seen or heard by anyone. How many of them are being tortured or abuse invisibly? How many of them are dead – where no one knows?"***

The member of the executive committee of National League for

Democracy of Dagon said that even though this inhuman treatment case was reported to the police, no action has been taken until today.

Ma Than Than Aye who was both physically and mentally suffering could only give a few answers while she was bombarded with questions.

While there is no mother to care for her and her father was occupied with work, now she is living with her uncle U Myo Oo.

U Myo Oo said that she felt safe living with him and the family. She is feeling at ease. Although Ma Than Than Aye is still a child, it seemed like she can somehow forgive those who committed these sins against her. ***“I felt really painful. I don't want to go back to that place but I don't want to do anything against them.”***