



Nine Years of Human Suffering in Kachin and Northern Shan States War, Forced Displacement, Human Rights abuses, and COVID-19 Myanmar (June 9th 2020)

The ongoing armed conflict between the Myanmar government armed Forces (Tatmadaw) and the Ethnic Armed Organizations including Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)¹, enters today in its 10th year of active war. This war has displaced over 120,000 civilians over 170 camps across Kachin and northern Shan States, provoked massive violations of Human Rights, creating immense suffering on civilians and depriving them from their most fundamental rights.

The Joint Strategy Team (JST)² has tirelessly been supporting, accompanying and providing essential humanitarian assistance and protection to those affected by this armed conflict, thanks to the support of many institutions and individuals to whom we express our sincere gratitude.

Today, on the 9th anniversary of the war, we, JST organisations continue to raise our deepest worries and concerns in solidarity with those affected by the horror of war and call on all stakeholders to urgently, pay attention to the IDPs concerns, needs and rights; and take all appropriate actions to fulfil their requests: particularly standing firmly on the protection of the dignity and rights of the Internally Displaced Persons and conflict affected communities.

After nine years of displacement, conditions in the IDP camps are far away from optimal; with overcrowded shelters, limited water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and almost non-existent health services in most of the camps; limited livelihoods opportunities, lack of quality education services, etc. All this creates an environment where gender and domestic based violence, lack of hope and mental disorders grow and add on the critical situation of IDPs.

At the same time, IDPs are experiencing terrible abuses, such as massive land grabbing in their original villages, which is exacerbated and stimulated by the government approval of the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Law, which implies IDPs losing their rights on their own lands in their place of origin.

In this context and now, with **the COVID-19 global pandemic**, we are extremely worried on the impact, it may have on IDPs communities, as well as those in refugee camps in nearby

¹The armed conflict between the Government Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) and the Kachin Independence Organisation/Army (KIO/KIA) broke out again in early June 2011, after 17 years of ceasefire.

²JST is a group of committed, professional Humanitarian local NGOs providing comprehensive, strategic, principled humanitarian assistance to people affected by armed conflict in Kachin and Northern Shan States. JST has a long trajectory in strategizing and delivering principled humanitarian assistance in complex contexts and it is highly knowledgeable and exposed to the International Humanitarian System.

countries (mainly Thailand and Bangladesh). IDPs are one of the most vulnerable groups to COVID-19 as they are living in a congested situation with limited services, where social distancing, and hygiene practices are difficult to be kept. Moreover, the loss of livelihoods and reduction of Humanitarian access, due to travel restrictions, make IDPs extremely worried for the transmission of disease in camps and their food security.

In the context of COVID-19, Tatmadaw announced on the 9th of May 2020 that they suspend their military operations until the 31st August 2020 across the country except in the conflict area in Rakhine and Southern Chin States. JST is deeply concerned with the situation in Rakhine and Southern Chin States where over 150,000 civilians have been displaced due to fighting between Arakan Army and Tatmadaw; increasing casualties, injuries and displacements of civilians. More over the implementation of “National Strategy for the closure of IDPs camps” in Rakhine, during COVID-19 period, is generating additional threats on forced return or resettlement with no guarantees of respecting IDPs’ rights.

URGENT REQUESTS:

Considering these dire circumstances, the JST makes the following *urgent requests to all those committed with Human Dignity and Human Rights and all the Stakeholders in this crisis:*

- 1. STOP THE WAR NOW IN THE WHOLE COUNTRY:** Guaranteeing that all parties implement a complete and immediate cessation of any military actions and hostilities, in all Myanmar territories; respecting fully civilian protection and abiding to International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. COVID-19 must be an opportunity to reset the agenda for peace based on justice and mutual respect of all the rich and diverse ethnic groups that compose the Myanmar.
- 2. PROTECT IDPs’ RIGHTS:** All IDPs Rights should be respected, the “National Strategy for the closure of IDP camps in Myanmar” promoted by the Government must stop immediately and should be replaced by an agreed National strategy for the respect of all rights of those affected by conflict or violence. Any return and resettlement strategy must be done according to International Humanitarian and Human Rights Laws and related “**durable solution**” standards. In this regard all kind of land grabbing acts must be stopped immediately in IDPs’ homelands. It must be ensured that IDPs are entitled to restore their housing, land and property rights in their places of origin.
- 3. ENSURE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS:** Myanmar government and the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) must take full responsibility and accountability for the rights of all the citizens of the Union of Myanmar, including and especially IDPs, and strictly observe International Humanitarian Law to ensure unimpeded access to all IDPs for organisations delivering humanitarian and COVID-19 related response assistance.
- 4. RESPECT TO HUMANITARIAN NATIONAL AND LOCAL ACTORS:** The international community including donors, UNs and INGOs should abide and fulfil its commitment on the “Humanitarian localization” agenda and the “Grand Bargain”; which means providing 25% of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020, along with more un-earmarked money, and increased multi-year funding. Reinforcing local humanitarian networks such as Joint Strategy Team (JST), Humanitarian Strategic Team – Northern Shan (HST-NS), Arakan Humanitarian Coordination Team (AHCT), Karenni Refugee Return and Resettlement Working Group (KnRRRWG), Local Resource Centre

(LRC), etc., as a matter of sustaining humanitarian work effectively on the ground and ensure its sustainability in the medium long term.

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