

HURFOM'S WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2019 STATEMENT



May 3, 2019

Today, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) is celebrating World Press Freedom Day. HURFOM believes that a free and independent press is the foundation of a functioning democracy, and that any action taken to intimidate

or silence journalists, and thus obscure and conceal the truth, is an attack on the principles of freedom, justice, equality, and representation upon which democracy rests. Press freedom holds the powerful to account, ensures that institutions remain fair and impartial, and provides people with the information they need to make informed decisions and exercise their political agency.

In recognition of the critical role the media have played in Burma/ Myanmar's democratic transition, HURFOM honors the many journalists, editors, and publishers who put their safety, well-being, and freedom at risk in the course of their duties, and extends deep gratitude to those who have sacrificed their freedom, or even their lives, under the banner of truth in journalism.

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WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2019 STATEMENT



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8 VILLAGERS SHOT DEAD IN ANAN KWIN VILLAGE BY MEMBERS OF LIGHT INFANTRY BATTALION NO. 339



April 6, 2019

HURFOM: On April 5th 2019, at approximately 3:30 am, seven villagers from Anan Kwin village, Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township, Karen State were shot dead by two soldiers from Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 339. An eighth victim later died in hospital. In the wake of these events, villagers

have begun to fear for their safety and well-being.

Speaking to the **Karen Information Network**, Karen National Police Force (KNPF) Deputy Police Chief Captain Saw Naing Chen stated, "As soon as we were informed of the incident, we sent our forces to the scene and they quickly discovered the bodies. We also found M16 shell casings on the scene. It appears that there were two families living in one household, and seven of them were killed on the spot. Villagers have told us that one of the shooters demanded the houseowner to hand over his motorbike but the houseowner

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8 VILLAGERS SHOT DEAD IN ANAN KWIN VILLAGE BY MEMBERS OF LIGHT INFANTRY BATTALION NO. 339

refused. It was then that the two soldiers opened fire on the families."

According to reports, though yet to be officially confirmed Tatmadaw Military Operations Command, Lieutenant Colonel Soe Moe Kyaw, Tactical Commander of LIB No. 339, has acknowledged that soldiers from his battalion are responsible for the killings, and that one of the two shooters, Private Myint Wai, has been arrested. Soldiers from LIB No. 339 are said to now be in active pursuit of the second shooter, Private Nyein Chan.

Speaking with HURFOM, a former KNU member who wishes to remain anonymous stated, *"If the killers are confirmed to be from LIB No. 339, villagers will lose the little trust they have in the Tatmadaw."*

The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the KNPF are also working in cooperation to apprehend the second shooter.

"I heard many gunshots, and I thought fighting had broken out in our village. I

get up early every morning for work to sell vegetables in the market, so I heard everything. Maybe 30 minutes after the gunshots had stopped, people began to flee our village," said Daw Win Myint, a resident of Anan Kwin village.

Also commenting on the incident was Saw Eh, a resident of Anan Kwin village who forages forest products to sell in the market, *"For today and the next few days, I will avoid the forest because I don't think it's safe until the other shooter is arrested. This is the first time in my life that I've seen a mass shooting."*

From at least 1962 onward, the region of Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township where Anan Kwin village is located has been under the control of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and thus considered a black area characterized by ongoing conflict. The extrajudicial killing of eight civilians by military forces, whether acting independently or not, threatens the fragile peace and stability that currently exists in the

region, and could prove to undermine the National Ceasefire Agreement.

As this case continues to develop, civil society organizations throughout southeastern Burma must keep watch to ensure that the rule of law is upheld and that the perpetrators of this heinous crime are brought to justice.

The names of those killed in the early hours of April 5th 2019 are as follows:

Daw Mi Shan, 38-year-old female.

Saw Naung, son of U Than Shwe, 43-year-old male.

Soe Naung, son of U Than Shwe, 38-year-old male.

Myo Naung son of U Than Shwe, 35-year-old male.

Kaung Khant Ko, son of Saw Naung, 9-year-old male.

Wa Ji Da Bee, daughter of Saw Naung, 3-year-old female.

Ro Kai Rah, daughter of Myo Naung, 1-year-old female.



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HURFOM'S WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2019 STATEMENT

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2019

**Without truth there is no justice.
Without justice there is no peace.
The fight for press freedom is the
fight for a democratic Burma.**



In 2019, only eight short years after the promise of a free and democratic Burma/Myanmar appeared on the horizon, press freedom in Burma/Myanmar is under direct threat from a confluence of laws that aim to curb and contain free expression. Together with Article 500 of the 1861 Penal Code, **Article 66(d)** of the 2013 Telecommunications Law has criminalized criticism of the government and the military, with journalists regularly jailed on dubious defamation charges. The 2014 News Media Law gives the government undue regulatory powers to quell criticism and promote state-crafted media narratives, whereas the 2017 Law Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens is deployed to again silence criticism of the authorities. Finally, two colonial era laws, the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act and the 1923 Official Secrets Act, have seen journalists arrested for interviewing members of Burma/Myanmar's many ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), for simply traveling within EAO territory, or for the publication of information deemed to jeopardize state security. Of equal concern, many of these same laws are also used to silence private individuals who express dissent or criticize public figures on social media.

The era of democratic reform has brought considerable change to Burma/Myanmar, but as the renewed attacks on

press freedom demonstrate, echoes of military rule ring far too loud. A Burma/Myanmar where democracy, human rights, and peace have been restored is only possible if journalists, editors, and publishers are free from fear of arbitrary arrest, detention, and reprisal. Until the laws that imperil press freedom are amended to be brought in line with international human rights standards, or are altogether abolished, Burma/Myanmar's transition to democracy will forever remain woefully incomplete.

In solidarity with **the 189 civil society organizations** in Burma/Myanmar who jointly honor and commemorate World Press Freedom Day 2019, HURFOM recommends the Burma/Myanmar Government to:

- ② Immediately release all political prisoners detained throughout Burma/Myanmar for their work in media.
- ② Amend or repeal Article 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law, the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act, the 1923 Official Secrets Act, Article 500 of the 1861 Penal Code, the 2014 News Media Law, and the 2017 Privacy Law in accordance with international principles and standards.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2019 STATEMENT

**THERE IS NO ONE
WHO DOES NOT MISS HOME**



**A Report on Protracted Displacement
Due to Armed Conflict in Burma/Myanmar**

June 20, 2019

HURFOM: On this World Refugee Day, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) is proud to announce the release of a new joint-report entitled “There Is No One Who Does Not Miss Home: A Report on Protracted Displacement Due to Armed Conflict in Burma/Myanmar.” Based on the work of 15 civil society organizations (CSOs) including HURFOM, the report documents the needs, concerns, and perspectives of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees long forced from their homes due to decades of armed conflict, oppression, and persecution.

In a grim summation of the report’s findings, Naw Blooming Night Zan of the Karen Refugee Committee shared these words:

“While aid for our country is increasing and there is this supposed increase in economic opportunities, we are instead witnessing some of the worst conditions for displaced ethnic communities we have observed in decades. Refugees are getting starved out of camps, while IDPs are risking their lives to seek livelihoods in areas riddled with landmines, face getting trafficked to feed their families, and ethnic people are dying as a result.”

Echoing the report’s recommendations, HURFOM’s Program Director Nai Awe Mon had the following to say about how best to resolve the protracted displacement of the Karen, Karenni, Mon, Ta’ang, Pa-Oh, Kachin and Shan communities featured in the report:

“All arrangements for repatriation and resettlement, and all other aspects of decision making that directly affect IDPs and refugees, must be done in consultation with these communities. These people must also be recognized as equal citizens once they return, otherwise there will be no durable solutions for them.

The peace process and national reconciliation must include those who are victims of past human rights violations, and donors must work to ensure that their support and assistance addresses the root causes of displacement such as armed conflict, foreign direct investment, and large-scale development projects. If they can do this, land, housing, and property rights will be protected.

I would also like to urge concerned governments, the donor community, international organizations, and other stakeholders that provide humanitarian aid and cross-border assistance to work with local ethnic CSOs who are implementing the work that the Myanmar government fails to do until we see safe, dignified, and voluntary returns for IDPs and refugees.”

Today, HURFOM stands shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with all refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people across the globe, and acknowledges the strength, courage, and perseverance required of these men, women, and children to seek a better tomorrow.

As the report notes, refugees and IDPs have hopes and dreams, they yearn for home, and want to contribute to making their communities and their country a better place. Now more than ever, decision makers must find the compassion, understanding, and political will needed to create conditions that provide for safe, dignified, sustainable, and voluntary return so these desires may one day become a reality.

The report is available in both [English](#) and [Burmese](#).

**THERE IS NO ONE
WHO DOES NOT MISS HOME**



**A Report on Protracted Displacement
Due to Armed Conflict in Burma/Myanmar**

HURFOM statement:

LIVING BETWEEN 3 FIRES: HURFOM'S INTERNATIONAL MINE AWARENESS DAY 2019 STATEMENT



April 4, 2019

HURFOM: Today, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) is celebrating the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. This year's theme, "United Nations Promotes SDGs – Safe Ground – Safe Home," reminds us that landmines, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices are not found on some distant battlefield, rather, they are weapons of war that contaminate the very lands upon which millions of innocent men, women and children live, work, and play. Not only do these ordnances maim, kill, and ultimately rob civilian populations of the right to life, liberty, and security of person, they prohibit internally displaced persons and refugees from returning to their rightful homes, and can impede social and economic development by preventing communities from fully utilizing their lands and resources.

Landmine victim from Alae Sakhan village, Yebyu Township, Mon State.

As of 2019, Burma/Myanmar is one of few remaining countries that has yet to sign the **1997 Mine Ban Treaty**, and is one of few countries that still **produces landmines**. Further, Burma/Myanmar currently has the distinction of being the only country where **government forces have been documented** using new antipersonnel landmines in military operations. Beyond the threat posed by the military, many of Burma/Myanmar's Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) are also documented as both producing and using new antipersonnel landmines. According to the **International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)**, as of 2017, Burma/Myanmar ranks seventh in the world and third in the east and south Asia and the Pacific region for the highest number of landmine casualties, with the problem being particularly acute in **Karen, Kachin, and Shan** states.

Since April 2018, HURFOM has documented seven separate landmine blasts on or close to plantations in Yebyu Township, Mon state. [1] Each blast occurred in an area under the mixed-control of the Burma Government, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and the Karen National Union (KNU). While no deaths resulted from these incidents, serious injury,

damage to private property and livestock, and the lingering fear to travel to and work on one's plantation have made life much more difficult for the victims and communities directly affected.

To gain further insight into how the presence of antipersonnel landmines has impacted the lives of villagers, HURFOM spoke with Nai Ngwe Tun, 59, a Village Administration Committee member from Alae Sakhan village, Yebyu Township.

"We've been living under dangerous conditions for the past six months because of repeated landmine explosions. In this time, there have been at least five explosions in Alae Sakhan village and close by. There is a rubber plantation here...more than 300 acres, but people are afraid to go to work because of the landmines...40 families are without work. We're afraid to even cross the motorway because there are mines on the other side. No one knows who's planting the mines.

We went to the Tatmadaw and asked if they could help [clear the mines] because they have the training, but they told us they couldn't help unless they received orders [to clear the mines]. We met with the NMSP too, and they told us they are working hard to protect us and protect our village. Both the KNU and the NMSP have signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement already, so they must work together to maintain peace.

We want to live without worry and without fear. We want to survive. All our lives, we have been living between three fires. It is very sad to see that the next generation will have to live like this too."

Succinct yet powerful, these words capture the thoughts and feelings of only one man among the **estimated five million people** living in landmine contaminated areas throughout Burma/Myanmar where the threat of being indiscriminately maimed or killed is an every day reality.

A Burma/Myanmar free of landmines, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices is one where all people need not fear their next step. It is one where the poverty, chronic food insecurity, and protracted displacement caused by landmine contamination has been eradicated. It is a Burma/Myanmar where all people have the freedom and opportunity to live long, healthy, and meaningful lives with access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living. Yet, for such a Burma/Myanmar to exist, the Burma Government, the military, and EAOs must immediately commit to ending the production, use, and stockpiling of all antipersonnel landmines, and work together to undertake effective mine clearance activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HURFOM recommends the Burma Government to:

- 2 Sign, ratify, and implement the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and

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News

SOLDIERS WHO KILLED 7 CIVILIANS IN ANAN KWIN VILLAGE TO FACE CRIMINAL CHARGES

April 11, 2019

HURFOM: As previously reported, seven villagers, including 3 children, were shot dead by members of Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 339 in Anan Kwin village, Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township, on April 5th 2019.

HURFOM has now learned that the eighth victim, who was initially reported to have died in hospital, regained consciousness on April 10th 2019. According to a friend of the victim, Mi Poe sustained serious injuries to her left abdomen and is still in critical condition.

"It is a wait-and-see situation, and we're not sure if she will recover," said the friend.

The killings were carried out by two members of LIB No. 339, Private Myint Wai, who was arrested in Phayar village on the day of the incident, and Private

Myein Chan, who was arrested in Anan Kwin village on April 6th 2019.

According to a post published by the Office of Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services on VK.com dated April 8th 2019, the two gunmen will be tried by court-martial on charges of absence without leave, offences in respect of property, and intoxication. Of particular significance, the post also revealed that under section 72 of the Defence Services Act, the two gunmen will be transferred to a civilian court to face criminal charges for the killing of seven villagers.

"We're happy to hear that the military will actually punish these men because in the past, soldiers were never held accountable for crimes like these. But it's important that both cases are transparent [the court-martial and criminal court proceedings] so the public can see the soldiers brought to

justice," said a member of the Karen National Union's Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township administrative committee.

As established in article 20(b) of the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, "the Defence Services has the right to independently administer and adjudicate all affairs of the armed forces." For this reason, soldiers are rarely prosecuted for crimes they commit, allowing the Tatmadaw to act against civilian populations with relative impunity.

News that the Myint Wai and Myein Chan will be brought before a civilian court to face criminal charges is encouraging, and will hopefully provide the victims, their families, and residents of Anan Kwin village with the justice they deserve.

HURFOM will continue to monitor this story as it develops.

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LIVING BETWEEN 3 FIRES: HURFOM'S INTERNATIONAL MINE AWARENESS DAY 2019 STATEMENT

Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.

- ② Develop and implement a practical, needs-driven, people-centred mine action policy for the identification and clearance of landmines, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices. This policy should give equal priority to protecting people in mine-affected areas from danger, supporting victims to return to full health and become active members of their communities, and providing opportunities for sustainable development and stability in mine-affected areas.

HURFOM recommends the military to

- ② Immediately end the production of new antipersonnel landmines.

- ② Immediately end the use of new antipersonnel landmines.

- ② Immediately end the stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines and destroy existing stockpiles.

- ② Immediately end the targeting of civilians in military operations.

- ② Engage in formal mine action efforts initiated by the Burma Government to identify and clear landmines, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices.

HURFOM recommends Ethnic Armed Organizations to:

- ② Immediately end the production of new antipersonnel landmines.

- ② Immediately end the use of new antipersonnel landmines.

- ② Immediately end the stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines and destroy existing stockpiles.

- ② Immediately end the targeting of civilians in military operations.

- ② Engage in formal mine action efforts initiated by the Burma Government to identify and clear landmines, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices.

[1] See, *Three landmine blasts injure one, damage property, and livestock in Yebyu Township; Three villagers injured by landmines in less than two months as land dispute between the NMSP and KNU drags on in Yebyu Township; Farmers afraid to attend plantations after man injured from landmine blast in Yebyu Township*

News

GOVERNMENT IMPOSES UNPOPULAR RULE AIMING TO REVERSE DECLINING FISH STOCKS, VILLAGERS SAY MAWLAMYINE CEMENT LIMITED TO BLAME

April 10, 2019

HURFOM: Fisherfolk in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, say that a ban on small-gauge fishing nets, which the government claims have contributed to declining fish stocks and biodiversity in the Attran River, are misdirected and will lead to increased financial hardship. In response to the ban, fisherfolk say they will continue to use these nets despite the risk of penalty and have placed responsibility for the decline on **Mawlamyine Cement Limited (MCL)**.

On March 28th 2019, Daw Khin Myo Myint, member of Mon State Parliament from Kyaikmayaw Township, met with fisherfolk at the Shwe Hin Thar Hall in Kyaikmayaw City. At the meeting, Daw Khin Myo Myint explained that the ban had been implemented as a measure to protect the number and variety of fish in the Attran, and that those who failed to comply with the ban would be subject to penalties as prescribed in **The Freshwater Fisheries Law**.

"If a fisherman is caught using a small-gauge fishing net [mesh with a diameter of less than 25.4 mm], all fishing materials will be seized, and he or she

will be sentenced up to 3 years imprisonment and fined 30,000 kyat (US \$19.94)," said Daw Khin Myo Myint.

"Daw Khin Myo Myint shouldn't say that the decline of fish species is related to using small [gauge] nets. The number of fish declined immediately after MCL began operations, but she said nothing about MCL and blamed the fishermen. There must be a bias. We are the ones who have to suffer," said a local fisherman.

Prior to the construction of MCL's cement factory in 2015, **fisherfolk are reported to have caught some 700 peittha** (1,155 kilograms) of fish per year. Since 2015, when construction was completed and the factory went into operation, the overall catch is said to have declined by 80% to just 140 **peittha** (231 kilograms) per year. **From 2015 onward, villagers, the monastic community, and some members of parliament** have been in open opposition to MCL's presence in the region on account of the negative impact that MCL's operations have had on local livelihoods and the environment.

"We don't agree with the ban, but we can't oppose the government. We have to obey the law. If they arrest us, we will suffer a great loss [fishing materials seized; costly legal proceedings]. If we want to maintain our livelihoods, we have to use the large nets [mesh with a diameter of at least 76.2 mm]," continued the local fisherman.

According to government sources, the ban has been introduced to protect juvenile fish and thus safeguard biodiversity and replenish fish stocks. However, fisherfolk along the Attran say the need to use small-gauge nets to catch small prawn, and that using these nets saves time as they are easier to clean than wider-gauged nets.

Some fisherfolk have vowed to openly defy the ban.

"Large nets can injure our hands. It also takes time to clean them, and it isn't easy to do. We can't catch fish during the rise and fall of the tide with them either, so we will continue catching fish with the small nets. If they want to arrest us, they can go ahead and arrest us," said U K—, a fisherman from Nidon village.

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News

PLANTATIONS ABANDONED AND PEACE OF MIND LOST AFTER 5TH VILLAGER WOUNDED BY LANDMINE IN KYAUNG SHAR KWIN AREA SINCE OCTOBER

May 3, 2019

On April 23rd 2019, Daw Hnin Se, a 63-year-old woman from the Kyaung Shar Kwin area, near Alae Sakhan village, Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Region, lost the large toe on her left foot when she stepped on a landmine while harvesting betel nuts. The woman was admitted to Dawei General Hospital following the incident but has since relocated to Yangon General Hospital with the financial support of area residents.

"It's [betel nut] harvesting season, so many people are currently working on plantations. Daw Hnin Se has to do this work every day to make a living. She stepped on a landmine while she was working and lost her toe," said U Tin San, the administrator of Alae Sakhan village.

Since October 2018, HURFOM has documented **seven separate landmine blasts** on or close to plantations in Yebyu Township, Mon state. In an effort to protect civilians in this region, the **Mines Advisory Group (MAG)** has undertaken to **educate locals** to

recognize, avoid, and report such threats to MAG community liaison staff.

"MAG educated us about what to do after stepping on a landmine. We've requested the group to carry out a second training. But, just educating people will change nothing...what we want is to eliminate landmines in our area. Only when there are no landmines can we return to our plantations to work. If the possibility of stepping on a landmine remains, we will not return to our plantations. We lose entire harvests because of this," continued U Tin San.

According to villagers, betel nut plantations in the Kyaung Shar Kwin area have largely been abandoned due to fears of serious injury or death following blasts in October and November of 2018 that left four villagers wounded.

"I refuse to go to my plantation in Kyaung Shar Kwin. Plantation workers frequently step on landmines, so I had to abandon it. Now it's the harvest season, and I suffer financial losses because I'm too scared to go to my plantation. Is it fair that villagers have

to suffer like this? I want the authorities to solve this problem as soon as possible," said U Wai, a plantation owner from Alae Sakhan village.

"After the previous landmine blasts, plantation owners stopped going to their fields. But now, some villagers have started to work on the plantations again, like Daw Hnin Se. Villagers thought there were no more landmines, but when things like this happen, villagers again fear returning to the plantations," said the Alae Sakhan village administrator.

Being an area that falls under the mixed-control of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Karen National Union (KNU), the Alae Sakhan village administrator reported the incident to the NMSP and the KNU, but went on to state that neither group have investigated the incident, and have shown little desire to eliminate the threat posed by landmines.

As with the seven blasts that have occurred since October 2018, it remains unclear who planted the landmine that wounded Daw Hnin Se.

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"I never heard about the ban on small fishing nets. All fishermen use them. By banning these nets, they've smashed our rice pot [destroyed our livelihoods]. The money we get from fishing is how we make our living. We only farm our land after we've made money from fishing. None of us support the ban. All of us [all fisherfolk] will go down to the river together and fish at the same time. If they come to arrest us, we'll let them arrest us," said U H—, another fisherman from Nidon village.

According to U H—, most local fisherfolk wanted to voice their opposition to the ban at the March 28th meeting convened by Daw Khin Myo Myint, but the expected Mon-Burmese language barrier between themselves and the lawmaker

discouraged many from attending. Now, U H— worries that the absence of vocal opposition at the meeting has been interpreted by the lawmaker as tacit approval of the ban. Nevertheless, those who did attend the meeting are now organizing fisherfolk throughout Kyaikmayaw Township to collectively oppose the ban.

Mawlamyine Cement Limited is a joint-venture between **Siam Cement Group (SCG)** and Pacific Link Cement Industries (PLCI). Beyond contributing to the sharp decline in biodiversity and fish stocks in the Attran River in recent years, **soil erosion, damage to homes** along the banks of the Attran, **damage to fishing nets**, and difficulties in accessing **clean water, forest products, and natural**

construction materials have all been attributed to MCL's operations. In 2018, tragedy struck when one of the many vessels hired to transport coal to MCL's factory **hit and killed Ma Pae Pae**, a local fisherwoman.

Together with declining fish stocks, fishing nets repeatedly damaged by MCL-hired vessels, and costly home repairs due to river bank erosion, the ban on small-gauge nets will likely compound the livelihood challenges that fisherfolk in Kyaikmayaw Township face. Protecting the number and variety of fish in the Attran is crucial if the river is to be relied upon by fisherfolk as a source of food and income. Yet, if lawmakers continue to sanction those who want nothing more than to see the river protected while overlooking the impact that MCL's operations have had on the environment, they may soon find that there are no fish in the Attran left to protect.

News

VILLAGERS POINT TO MAWLAMYINE CEMENT LIMITED AS CONCERNS OVER ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE GROW



May 2, 2019

HURFOM: Increasing temperatures have prompted residents of Kaw Pa Naw village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State to voice their concerns about climate change, with some linking local environmental changes to **Mawlamyine Cement Limited's** (MCL) nearby operations.

One such individual is the Abbot of the Tu Ma Na Monastery in Kaw Pa Naw village, who believes increased temperatures in both the cool and hot season are the result of MCL's activities.

"In the past, it was cool during the cool season, and temperatures were as expected during the hot season. Now, it's no longer like this. It's hot during the cool season, and even hotter in the summer. The water levels in our wells and streams have also decreased," said the Abbot.

"At this time in previous years, it was hot, but the heat was tolerable. This year, the heat is unbearable. Mount Pyar Taung has also been stripped of all its trees. The cement factory operates every day, and we think this contributes to the rise in temperatures. To prove that there is a connection, we'll have to invite experts who can conduct research," the Abbot continued.

In keeping with the views of the Abbot, residents affirm that temperatures continue to rise with each passing year,

and though they suspect that MCL's operations have contributed to these changes, they do not have evidence that directly ties MCL to the temperature increases.

"The weather is incredibly hot. In the past, Mount Pyar Taung and the surrounding areas were green, but now nothing is left," said Nai Tun Kyi, a local activist.

Continuing, Nai Tun Kyi stated that in response to sustained opposition from locals who live near MCL's factory, MCL has reduced the intensity and frequency of limestone blasting on Mount Pyar Taung and has agreed to no longer conduct blasts during the *Uposatha* (Buddhist day of observance). Even so, a reduction in the frequency and intensity of blasting is little consolation to villagers who have been subject to all manner of environmental degradation in recent years.

Although indisputable evidence linking MCL's operations to rising temperatures may be difficult to provide, villagers throughout Kyaikmayaw Township point to MCL as responsible for the recent **decline in biodiversity and fish stocks** in the Attrian River, **soil erosion**, and increasing difficulty in accessing **clean water, forest products, and natural construction materials**.

Given the negative impact that MCL's operations have had on local livelihoods and the environment, **villagers**, the **monastic community**, and some **members of parliament** have been in open opposition to MCL's presence in the region from **2015 onward**. Despite these efforts, Nai Tun Kyi alleges there is a growing sense of defeat among residents who have yet to see authorities hold MCL to account for the destruction it has caused.

"Locals have grown tired of protesting MCL's operations because years of opposition have not brought about any change. Today, the villagers have gone silent," says Nai Tun Kyi.

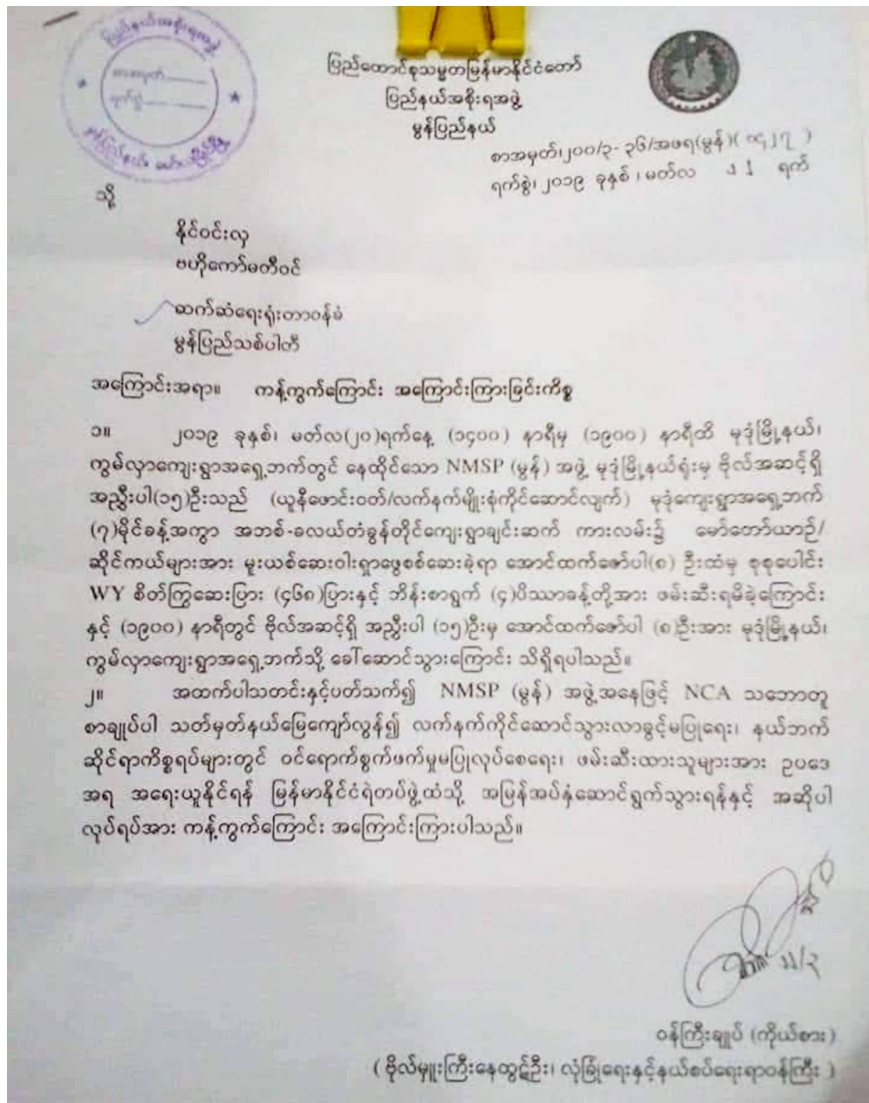
Mawlamyine Cement Limited is a joint-venture between **Siam Cement Group (SCG)** and Pacific Link Cement Industries (PLCI). The factory operates a 40-megawatt coal-fired power plant to maintain production, and currently produces 5,000 tons of cement per day.

Linking MCL's activities to rising temperatures in the region may not be possible, but the above reports of extreme heat and the decreasing availability of fresh water do mirror concerns raised in a report on climate change in Burma published by **The Guardian** in late 2018, and further establishes that those who rely on the natural environment for their livelihood and well-being are acutely aware of how the climate is changing in real time.

"At this time in previous years, it was hot, but the heat was tolerable. This year, the heat is unbearable. Mount Pyar Taung has also been stripped of all its trees. The cement factory operates every day, and we think this contributes to the rise in temperatures. To prove that there is a connection, we'll have to invite experts who can conduct research,"

News

ACCUSATIONS OF VIOLATING CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT PROMPT NMSP TO RELEASE BURMA ARMY SOLDIER ARRESTED FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING TO MON STATE POLICE



May 9, 2019

HURFOM: On March 20th 2019, one Burma Army soldier and seven civilians were arrested by New Mon State Party (NMSP) authorities on charges of drug trafficking outside Kwan Hlar village, Mudon Township, Mon State. The eight were to be sentenced in accordance with NMSP law, though in compliance with demands from the Mon State government's Ministry of Security and Border Affairs, on April 24th 2019, the NMSP released the soldier to the custody of Mon State police.

In a statement published on March 22nd 2019, two days after the arrests were made, the Mon State Ministry of Security and Border Affairs issued a demand that the soldier be released. In the statement, the ministry also

condemned NMSP authorities for contravening the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) by placing armed troops in an area under the jurisdiction of the Mon State government, without first securing permission to do so, when conducting the anti-drug operations that led to the soldier's arrest.

"We had no alternative but to hand over the soldier after hearing the ministry's demands. He [the soldier] is a member of the Burmese military, and we're obligated to cooperate with the Mon State government under the terms of the NCA. However, the seven civilians will remain in NMSP custody, said Nai Raja, the chairperson of the NMSP's Liaison Office in Mudon Township.

According to Sergeant Nai Mile Way of the Mudon NMSP, the soldier in

question, Private Ye Kyaw Zin Oo of Light Infantry Battalion No. 209, was in possession of 116 yaba (methamphetamine) pills at the time of his arrest.

A member of the NMSP's Central Executive Committee, Nai Aung Ma Ngay, states that locals have requested NMSP authorities to take action against people who use and sell drugs, as they believe **drug use in the region has increased** as of late.

"There's been a rise in drug use, so locals have requested us to arrest the drug users and dealers in this area. In doing so, we arrested a Burmese soldier but have since handed him over to Mon State police," said Nai Aung Ma Ngay.

As confirmed by Police Major Moe Lwin Oo of the Mudon Police Force, Private Ye Kyaw Zin Oo was released by the NMSP on April 24th 2019, and charged under Article 19 of the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law** once in police custody.

Such cooperation comes after a period of tense relations between the NMSP, the Mon State government, and the military. In March of 2019, Mon National Liberation Army troops (the armed wing of the NMSP) were **ordered to remove their uniforms** when providing security at the funeral of the venerable Abbot of Rehmonnya Nikarya Kaw Sein Monastery in Ye Township. In September 2018, the Mon State Ministry of Security and Border Affairs moved to **restrict activities related to Mon Affairs**, while in March 2018, the NMSP was ordered by the military to **limit the number of attendees** at public forums organized to discuss the NCA and other Mon political issues with Mon citizens.

Despite lingering tensions, the NMSP has maintained peaceful relations with the military since the signing of the NCA in **February 2018**. For now, the decision to release Private Ye Kyaw Zin Oo to authorities in Mon State may reassure residents of Mudon Township that peace will continue to hold.

News

WITH HURFOM'S SUPPORT, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CHART PATH FORWARD FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN MON STATE



June 14, 2019

On June 7th 2019, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) hosted a Transitional Justice Working Committee meeting at the Rehmonnya Hotel in Mawlamyine, Mon State. The 10-member committee, made up of residents from Ye Township, Yebyu Township, and Thanbyuzayat Township, met to devise a one-year action plan on how best to initiate a grassroots transitional justice process to address past human rights violations in Mon State.

"People who have had their human rights violated over the past 20 years are still suffering in silence. The [National League for Democracy] government must take responsibility to heal the wounds of people who have been abused or have had loved ones killed. Some people were forced to live in Thailand to avoid human rights violations. The government must create the conditions for these people to return home and live in safety...And those who have committed human rights violations must be punished. This is the purpose of initiating the transitional justice process," said HURFOM's Executive Director, Nai Kasauh Mon.

Human rights violations in Mon State and other areas of southeastern Burma throughout the past 20 years include **land confiscations by the military, sexual violence against women and children, forced migration and relocation, and forced labor.**

Over the coming year, the Working Committee seeks to acknowledge the injustice and suffering visited upon victims of human rights violations, to provide those victims with a measure of justice for the indignities they have endured, and to support national reconciliation and Burma's transition to democracy.

Already in 2019, and based upon more than 20 years of human rights documentation in Mon State, HURFOM has hosted transitional justice training workshops in Ye, Yebyu, and Thanbyuzayat townships. There are plans to extend the training workshops to areas of northern Mon State by year's end.

"Through transitional justice, we can understand the how those who have had their rights violated feel about their experience, and I hope that the

government will now be able to do something for them. Those who have committed violations against innocent people have to be punished. I think there is a lot of value in the transitional justice process," said Nai Bnyair Mon, a committee member from Ye Township.

As part of their one-year action plan, the committee will celebrate International Human Rights Day by holding local community hearings for victims and survivors of past human rights abuses. The committee has also committed to collect testimonials related to past rights violations, to educate villagers about the transitional justice process, and to expand the transitional justice network in Mon State by connecting with organizations specializing in the field of transitional justice.

For more on HURFOM's human rights documentation and how this information is used to support transitional justice efforts in Mon State, please read HURFOM's 2017 report *'I Still Remember': Desires for acknowledgment and justice for human rights violations in Mon areas of southern Burma.*

News

MON STATE GOV'T ACCUSED OF EXTORTION AS VILLAGERS FORCED TO FOREGO COMPENSATION FOR LAND SOLD TO SOUTHERN MYANMAR DEVELOPMENT CO. LTD



May 23, 2019

HURFOM: Plantation owners from Aung Tha Pyay and Hnit Kayin villages, from whom the government purchased land to construct the soon to be completed Ye-Thanyuzayat road, are accusing the Mon State government of extortion after the government withheld 20 percent of the compensation owed to each landowner. Villagers were to be compensated 10 million kyat (USD \$6,519.22) for every acre of land they sold, but intimidation and threats of land confiscation have forced them to surrender one-fifth of their expected compensation to the government.

"Construction of the road was a joint project between the government and the Southern Myanmar Development Company. The government can use the state budget to pay the company...There's no reason why we should have to contribute. Now we, the poor, have to pay for the road. We want full compensation for our land.

Contributing to the project should be our decision to make, but they just take 20 percent of what we're owed without our consent. We also don't know what's being done with the money they've kept," said a woman from Thanbyuzayat Township.

In addition to the 20 percent withheld by the government, the Road Construction Committee, a group of prominent village members responsible for mediating between the government and the landowners, collected 10,000 kyat (US \$6.52) from each landowner when distributing the payments.

"I think the money should only be taken after getting the approval of the landowners. Personally, I didn't want to give any of my money to the project. A minister told me that by refusing to comply, we delayed construction of the road, and that other plantation owners had planned to protest our decision. Because of this, we had to sign an agreement to give over 20 percent of what we were owed even though we

didn't want to. They should have negotiated with us. We feel threatened. It's not right that others get to decide what to do with our money. It shouldn't be like this," said U B—, a plantation owner from Thanbyuzayat Township.

The plantation owners had initially requested 20 million kyat (US \$13,044.25) for each acre of land, but after negotiations between the government and the Road Construction Committee, the owners agreed to accept 10 million kyat per acre.

"After we agreed to accept 10 million kyat per acre, the government told us to contribute 20 percent of the compensation we received towards the project. Some landowners agreed, but others didn't. The government officials then said that if our lands happen to be seized after the road is completed, they wouldn't be able to help us. After hearing that, many of us were afraid of losing our land, so we signed the agreement," said Nai K—, another plantation owner from Thanbyuzayat Township.

News

SHARING THE SPIRIT OF PROTECTION: HURFOM'S WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2019 STATEMENT



June 5, 2019

HURFOM: On this World Environment Day, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) stands in solidarity with the countless many in Burma/Myanmar and beyond whose lives have been disrupted by the consequences of environmental degradation. A healthy environment is one that provides for health and well-being, but when the air, land, and sea fall into disrepair, it is those most intimately connected to the natural environment that suffer most.

In Mon State and other areas of southeastern Burma/Myanmar, local populations are dependent upon the natural environment to earn their livelihoods and meet their daily needs. From farming, and fishing to collecting natural construction materials and traditional medicines, it is the rivers and forests of this region that sustain life. In recent years, HURFOM has documented how a number of large-scale development projects have contributed to environmental degradation in the region, so to better understand what is being done to combat these harms, HURFOM spoke with three individuals who have chosen to devote their time and energy to environmental protection.

For U Soe Tun, one method of protecting the environment involves teaching youth about the rich diversity of plant and animal life found in the forest, and how to be environmentally responsible.

U Soe Tun – Conservation Ranger, Thayarmon Community Forest

“As a Conservation Ranger, my work involves tree planting, protecting the forest that we have now, and wildlife protection. I also spend my time raising awareness about conservation with youth, educating them about the forest, such as the different types of trees, plants, and animals that can be found here, or even how to dispose of garbage properly. I use different methods to do this, like writing songs about the forest, or organizing cycling events.

Here we have a lot of valuable trees like ironwood and timbre, and many valuable plants as well. Through our efforts, we also make sure that the wildlife here aren’t forced to leave because of deforestation. Conservation also means that our water is protected.”

U Myo Min also believes that young people play a central role in environmental protection, and that

adults must engage young people in environmental protection directly for them to truly understand what could be lost if action is not taken.

U Myo Min – Dawei Mountain Rescue Team (DMRT)

“I hope everyone is aware of the many critical environmental issues we face around the world today. In my mind, there is absolutely no doubt that these challenges are getting worse day-by-day. Here in Dawei, the environmental impacts we see are directly connected to people’s behavior. Some people know what they should be doing to protect the environment, and they don’t do it, but for others there is still some lack of awareness. This is why the DMRT focuses on awareness raising, so that we can preserve and recover as much of the natural environment as we can.

A lot of our advocacy is targeted at young people, and we also work to organize young people to become involved in conservation and protection activities. We plan study trips and bring groups of youth to mountain and forest areas so they can see the natural environment with their own eyes, but we also point out what has already been

[Read more on page14>>](#)

News

MAN ARRESTED FOR THE RAPE AND MURDER OF 4-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN THANBYUZAYAT TOWNSHIP

June 14, 2019

HURFOM: On June 5th 2019, a 4-year-old girl from Aung Thu Khaw Ward, Kyaik Kha Mi Town, Thanbyuzayat Township, was raped, killed, and her body disposed of in a lake by a 28-year-old man who had relocated to the area for work. The perpetrator has since been arrested and charged for his crimes.

According to witnesses, the young girl was playing outside her home when she was approached by the man at approximately 4pm on the afternoon of June 5th. The man lured the girl away from her home by promising to buy her snacks if she followed him.

By approximately 7pm that evening, the girl had yet to return to her home. Concerned, the girl's mother reported her daughter missing to U Thar Byaw, the Aung Thu Khaw Ward Administrator. Accompanied by U Thar Byaw, a team of villagers searched for

the girl but were unable to locate her. It was then that the two witnesses reported seeing the man with the young girl to the Ward Administrator. The search party confronted the perpetrator at his home where he was quick to deny the accusations made against him.

"Along with other villagers, I asked the man if he had raped the girl, but he denied our accusations. Then the witnesses came forward to say that he was the person who took the girl. People were angry and started to attack him, but I stopped them and brought him to the police station. After being questioned by police, he confessed that he had raped the girl, killed her, and thrown her body in a nearby lake," said U Thar Byaw, the Ward Administrator.

"After he confessed, we all went to the lake to search for the girl's body but could not find her. At about 10pm the girl's body emerged from the lake. We sent the girl's body to the hospital for a medical examination, and on June

6th the doctor confirmed that she had been raped," continued U Thar Byaw.

The perpetrator has been charged by Kyaik Kha Mi police under Penal Code 201 (Causing disappearance of evidence of offence), 302 (Punishment for murder), and 376 (Punishment for rape).

This is the fifth incident of sexual and gender-based violence that **HURFOM has reported** since January 2019, though it is the first where the victim's life has been brought to such a tragic end. In 2017, a total of 44 cases of child rape **were reported to Mon State police**, whereas **in 2018 this number rose to 57**. The disturbing rise in reports of child rape from 44 to 57 signals a 29.5% net increase in cases of child sexual abuse reported in Mon State between 2017 and 2018, which is in keeping with a broader Burma-wide trend of increases in the reporting of sexual abuse to authorities over the last five years.

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lost. Our goal is to help young people realize how important the natural environment is to all of us, how everyone here relies on the forests, and to think about what could happen if the forests continue to disappear.

I hope that young people will continue to become more involved in environmental issues and identify what they can do personally to support the conservation and protection of our environment. This is practical awareness raising. We are sharing the spirit of protection with them."

For activist Nai Choon, environmental protection is about departing with fossil fuel technologies and extractive industries, and upholding the rule of law.

Nai Choon – Activist, Mawlamyine

"When we see the impacts on the environment, there is no doubt that humans have caused this. We have water, we have air, and we have solar energy, and all of these can be very useful. These are renewable resources. In my opinion, we need to invest and start creating technology to use these types of energy to end the negative impacts we're having on our environment. We should start with small-scale solutions. If we do this, we can grow and develop without harming the environment.

I totally oppose all mining projects that damage our water resources, our forests, our ecosystems. These activities

should be outlawed. There is a law, but it's not enforced [1992 Forest Law]. I think if one tree is cut down, another two trees should be planted. With ideas like these, we can maintain our forests and protect them from disappearing."

Taking our cue from U Myo Min, on this World Environment Day HURFOM wishes to invite all of Burma/ Myanmar's peoples to share in the spirit of protection. A healthy environment is what sustains life and affords all of us the opportunity to pursue social, spiritual, and intellectual growth. Whether it is holding corporations to account for their destructive environmental practices, teaching children about our connection to the natural environment, or making a personal commitment to lead a more sustainable life, no effort is too small when environmental protection is our goal. We believe World Environment Day is a day of the people and for the people, and HURFOM commends the courageous efforts of everyone who fights tirelessly to secure our common future.

News

FUNDING CRISIS LEAVES MAJORITY OF MON NATIONAL SCHOOLS UNABLE TO ACCEPT STUDENTS ON FIRST DAY OF CLASSES



June 6, 2019

HURFOM: According to Nai Rot Ka Kao, a member of the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), nearly three-quarters of all Mon National Schools needed for the 2019–2020 academic year require renovation, reconstruction, or have yet to be constructed. Currently, the MNEC does not have the budgetary capacity to cover the associated costs, leaving village-level education committees responsible for securing their own funding to renovate or construct individual schools. The school year begins June 3rd 2019.

“Forty percent of our schools need to be renovated. Approximately 17 percent of our schools do not have their own school buildings, and we have to use local monasteries as classrooms. After our engineers surveyed the schools we do have [including monasteries], we obtained a concrete list of schools that need to be renovated or newly constructed,” said Nai Rot Ka Kao

In some villages, schools have been constructed, but most of the schools administered by the MNEC are housed in monasteries.

“Some schools have been built. For example, six or seven schools in Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township are ready for use. We have one school in Nyi Sar [an area under New Mon State Party control] that was constructed by an organization from Switzerland. The school is very good...But overall, there are not many schools that are in good condition. I would say less than 20 percent of our schools are ready to be used. Forty percent of our schools need to be renovated, and 30 percent of our schools need new construction [this includes both reconstructed and newly constructed schools]. So, we have a lot of infrastructure to build in the coming year,” continued Nai Rot Ka Kao.

According to the MNEC’s survey, Mon National Schools in townships throughout the state require either renovation or construction.

In villages where funds have been secured, the construction or reconstruction of schools has been completed in time for the 2019–2020 academic year, though many villages have had to halt construction due to funding shortages.

“Our school doesn’t have much financial support, so we start and stop construction depending on the funds available. Right now, the [village-level] education committee has provided funding to build a roof for our school, but the school won’t be ready to accept students when the school year starts,” said Nai Nyne Oo, chairperson of the Basic Education Primary School Committee for the Mon National School in Wae Rat village, Thanbyuzayat Township.

The news that some 70 percent of Mon National Schools are not ready to accept students follows shortly after the MNEC announced that they have yet to obtain textbooks for the 2019–2020 school year, and are unsure when the books will be acquired.

Originally named the Central Education Department, the MNEC was founded by the New Mon State Party in 1972. As of 2018, the MNEC operates 132 Mon National Schools serving 10,436 students, with an additional 92 mixed schools operated in cooperation with the Union government serving 14,137 students. There are 780 teachers and 59 education staff employed in the Mon National School system.

News

VILLAGERS RELUCTANT TO VOICE TRUE CONCERNS IN PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING WITH JUNE CEMENT LTD.



June 21, 2019

HURFOM: On June 15th 2019, **June Cement Industry Ltd.** hosted a public consultation meeting in Mae Ga Row village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State. The meeting was held to inform villagers living near June Cement's operations of the company's proposed work plan, and to solicit feedback from villagers. The company's operations are located in the Mount Pyar Taung region of Kyaikmayaw Township, **home to the controversial Mawlamyine Cement Limited (MCL) factory.**

Apart from villagers, those in attendance included Mon State lawmakers, officials from the Kyaikmayaw Township General Administration Department, and officials from the Department of Agriculture Land Management and Statistics.

"Today, [June Cement] organized a public consultation meeting in the common hall of the Mae Ga Row monastery. They provided information about their cement factory, and their plans to level some of the land they've purchased so they can build a jetty and an artificial canal. After this, they asked villagers if they had any questions or feedback," said Nai Tun Kyi, member of a civilian committee responsible for

monitoring all large-scale investment projects in the Mount Pyar Taung region.

"The company already has permission from above [the Union government], so villagers only asked who will take responsibility for any negative impacts from the project, how the company will power the project, and if stone mining will destroy religious sites on the mountain," Nai Tun Kyi continued.

As stated by officials from June Cement, there are no immediate plans to complete construction of the cement factory, but they hope to soon complete the construction of a jetty and a canal. Company officials also pledged to minimize the intensity of blasting when mining for limestone, and revealed that the factory will be powered by a coal-fired power station. To assuage concerns about the potential impact that a coal-fired power plant could have on the local environment, officials told the audience they had a plan in place to minimize any negative effects, but did not provide any details.

Though villagers may have legitimate concerns about the potential health and environmental impacts of a coal-fired power plant, **as evidenced by HURFOM in 2017,** attendees are reported not to have voiced opposition

to the project. Given that June Cement has already secured permission to proceed with operations, and that villagers were in the presence of authorities, there are fears that opposition may discourage authorities from pursuing future development projects in the Mount Pyar Taung region.

"The cement project was already agreed upon by the authorities and the company. If we oppose the project, the authorities may misunderstand us...they may think we are against development. We only asked questions based on the information they gave us," said Nai Tun Kyi.

According to local reports, threats of land confiscation have forced villagers to sell some 800 acres of farmland to June Cement since 2010. In addition to forced land sales, **locals have also reported having their land sold to June Cement without their knowledge.**

With an investment of US \$471 million, June Cement will produce 5,000 tons of cement per day once its factory has entered full operation. The Myanmar Investment Commission gave June Cement permission to operate in March 2015.

Currently, the Myanmar-Korea Cement Group (**Zaykabar Company Ltd.**), **Mawlamwyine Cement Ltd.**, and June Cement Industry Ltd. operate mining activities on the limestone-rich Mount Pyar Taung. When considering **the impact of MCL's operations on the environment,** further environmental degradation resulting from the transport of more cement and the operation of a second coal-fired power station in the region will only compound the difficulties already encountered by villagers in the region.

The cement project was already agreed upon by the authorities and the company. If we oppose the project, the authorities may misunderstand us...they may think we are against development. We only asked questions based on the information they gave us

Information on HURFOM and Invitation for Feedbacks from Readers

Dear Readers,

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1995, by a group of young Mon people, The main objectives of HURFOM are:

- ☐ Monitoring the human rights situation in Mon territory and other areas in southern Burma
- ☐ Protecting and promoting internationally recognized human rights in Burma,

In order to implement these objectives, HURFOM produces the monthly “Mon Forum” newsletters. If publication is delayed it is because we are waiting to confirm information, and it comes with our heartfelt apologies.

We encourage you to write to us if you have feedback or if you know someone who you think would like to receive the newsletter.

Please email or mail a name and address to:

HURFOM, P.O. Box 35, Sangkhalburi Post Office,

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E-mail: info@rehmonnya.org

Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director

Human Rights Foundation of Monland

TEENAGE GIRL IN MAWLAMYINE TOWNSHIP FINALLY SEES HER RAPIST BROUGHT TO JUSTICE

June 18, 2019

HURFOM: According to U Thet Tun of the Mitta Zone See Organization, on May 30th 2019, a man detained by authorities for the repeated rape of his niece was sentenced to 10 years in prison. In 2017, following the death of her father and her mother's second marriage, the victim and her younger brother were sent to live with their grandmother in Zayar Thiri Region, Mawlamyine Township, Mon State. It was in this residence that the girl was repeatedly raped by her uncle.

“We will file an appeal as the rapist was sentenced to only 10 years imprisonment. A child rapist must be given a 20-year jail sentence. If we file an appeal, the sentence can be increased to 15 years. The victim just passed Grade 10 and will sit for her matriculation exam this year,” said U Thet Tun.

In February 2018, after completing her grade 10 examination, the girl learned

that she was six-months pregnant. In an attempt to conceal the uncle's crimes and deflect his responsibility for the pregnancy, the girl's grandmother pressured the girl to pursue a romantic relationship with a 19-year-old boy from the Zayar Thiri Region, and quickly forced her granddaughter to marry the young man.

Having learned of the girl's predicament, Daw Thi Thi Nwe, the Chair of Mitta Zone See Organization, visited the young woman in hospital after she had given birth, and soon took an active interest in the girl's well-being. At the victim's request, Daw Thi Thi Nwe filed rape charges against the girl's uncle and her husband. Both men have been detained by authorities in Mawlamyine since July 2018.

It remains unclear why the girl's husband has been charged with rape.

“The legal proceedings lasted about a year. Her uncle is now in jail, but the court hasn't made a decision about her

husband. We'll request that the court release him,” continued U Thet Tun.

“On June 3rd, I sent my son to stay at a Mon State Social Welfare Office so I can sit for my matriculation exam. I want to educate myself, and I want my child to be a doctor someday,” said the girl.

In 2018, the Mitta Zone See Organization provided support to 16 victims of rape. According to the organization, 18 cases of child sexual abuse have been reported to them since January 2019.

In light of this worrying trend, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) again calls on parliament to enact the Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women Bill so women and girls are provided the enhanced legal protections needed to disrupt the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in Mon State and across Burma.

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ADMINISTRATIVE DELAY AND BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS PREVENT TEXTBOOKS FROM REACHING MON NATIONAL SCHOOLS



May 20, 2019

HURFOM: According to officials from the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), the Union government has postponed the provision of new textbooks to Mon National Schools. The announcement comes as a shock to members of the MNEC who have come to rely on the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to provide textbooks at the beginning of each academic year. Currently, there is no clear indication of when the textbooks will be released, leaving the MNEC with little option but to purchase the materials from the DBE.

In years past, all textbooks used in middle schools and high schools administered by the Committee have been provided by the DBE.

"Every year, the books have been provided by the [Union] government, but this year, they've [DBE] said that they have to postpone giving us the books. They say that they have to first receive approval from the Ministry of Education," said Nai Rot Ka Kao, member of the MNEC.

"All the textbooks we receive are supplied by the government. The exception is in primary schools where Mon is the language of instruction. But for middle schools and high schools, we rely on the government for the books we need. We've had their support for years, but this year things have changed, and we don't know why. We have received support elsewhere, and some of our teachers have had the opportunity to train with government schoolteachers. Still, we don't understand why the government has instructed the

Department of Basic Education to postpone the release of this year's textbooks," continued Nai Rot Ka Kao.

The foremost concern among members of the MNEC is that the cost of acquiring the textbooks will exacerbate the MNEC's already precarious financial situation.

From the **construction** and **repair** of school buildings to ensuring that Mon National School teachers **are provided a salary**, or that **students have the materials** they need to succeed, the MNEC has repeatedly had to rely on donations raised by the monastic community, and provided by Mon communities abroad to cover operational costs. The purchase of textbooks for the upcoming academic year will likely deepen the MNEC's budgetary constraints and reduce its ability to absorb any future financial shock.

According to the MNEC, there are three Mon National High Schools, 16 Mon National Middle Schools, and 113 Mon National Primary Schools, with a total of 10,779 Mon students. There are approximately 800 teachers currently employed in the Mon National School system.

The DBE's decision to withhold the textbooks may not only jeopardize the viability of the Mon National School system, it undermines government efforts to implement the **National Education Strategic Plan (NESP)** by 2021, and by extension, to achieve **Sustainable Development Goal 4**: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

HURFOM

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