Common Charter of Demands by Women’s Groups for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment across the Peace-Humanitarian-Development Nexus in Kachin State, — Myanmar

Developed on 6 August 2018

Prepared by: The Kachin State Women Network (KSWN) and all its member organisations including Htoi Gender and Development Foundation, Kachin women Association(KWA), Good Hope Foundation, Dawn Peace Foundation, Momawk women, Shang Women Development Networking, Metta Development Foundation, Mingalar Foundation, Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG), Kindness Women Networking Group, KBC Women Department. DaiFan also contributed to this.
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Published UN Women, Myanmar 2018

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ISBN No. 978-974-680-418-9

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Produced by: UN Women, Myanmar
COMMON CHARTER OF DEMANDS BY WOMEN’S GROUPS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT ACROSS THE PEACE-HUMANITARIAN DEVELOPMENT NEXUS IN KACHIN STATE, — MYANMAR

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omen and girls in Kachin State are born to experience the nature of earth’s beauty, and to contribute peace, harmony and well-being in their families, communities, overall society and the nation to shape the process for sustainable development for all. On June 9, 2011, human-made armed conflict emerged in Kachin State, and has since then resulted in extensive loss of life, damage to infrastructures, destruction of livelihoods and protracted and continuous displacement of more than 100,000 civilians. Prolonged displacement and further restricted humanitarian access since 2016 has affected the displaced communities’ coping resilience, compounding vulnerabilities and marginalisation, and exposing communities to negative coping mechanisms, protection risks and threats including gender-based violence and human trafficking. Among the displaced and conflict affected population, women and girls are disproportionately impacted due to persistent gender inequalities and gender discrimination in society stemming from socio-cultural and religious norms, and further reflected across laws, policies, formal and informal institutions. Women from ethnic and religious minority groups, women of lower socio-economic status, displaced women, women living with disabilities, gender-based violence and human trafficking survivors, elderly women, adolescent girls, girls, pregnant and lactating women, transgender, lesbian and queer women are among the worst impacted suffering from multiple layers of discrimination and marginalization and who require targeted attention. This scenario is impeding women and girls in Kachin State’s participation in decision making, as well as their inclusion in recovery, transition, and peace processes, in order to shape peace, humanitarian and development policy, planning and programmes.

Yet women, women’s organisations and advocates are willing and ready to step up, if given the support and opportunities. It is crucial for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment to be recognized as a central element of peace building, humanitarian action and sustainable development. Achieving gender equality is precursor and accelerator for effective, accountable and sustainable strategies and together we all share a collective responsibility to achieve it. Hence, the Kachin State Women’s Network and its member organisations call on all stakeholders and duty bearers from across the Government of Myanmar, local authorities, CSOs, faith based organisations, and the international community to take action in accordance with this Common Charter of Demands for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment across the Peace-Humanitarian-Development Nexus in Kachin State, Myanmar.

Overall, and end to the conflict and promoting peace is the most paramount demand and dream of all people in
Kachin State, Myanmar.

**WOMEN, PEACE AND EMERGENCIES**

Women in Kachin State have a strong and growing interest and conviction that they have much to offer, and much to gain, from engaging in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. However, patriarchal socio-cultural norms, policy and legislation, continue to marginalize women from participating in the peace process. Women themselves are not aware of their rights to engage and women’s actual and potential contributions to crisis response, conflict resolution, recovery and peace building are often overlooked and women’s leadership in building community resilience and cohesion disregarded. As a result, their specific needs remain unmet and their voices unheard. If women and their advocates are absent in humanitarian and peacebuilding planning and decision-making processes, there will never be a complete understanding of the gendered vulnerabilities and impact of crises and conflict to design and inform policy, planning and programmes that are effective, accountable and based on sound evidence. Strengthening the capacities of women as leaders and decision makers, and providing them with the space, recognition and opportunities to participate in peace dialogues will bring Kachin State on the right track in achieving peace.

Women and girls in Kachin State are among the worst and disproportionately impacted by the ongoing crisis and conflict situation, yet they are also often the first crisis responders acting to ease the hardship of their community. As persistent gender inequalities, gender-based discrimination and violence are reinforced and exacerbated by emergencies, women and girls are among the most vulnerable and are targeted for sexual exploitation, abuse, violence and other human rights violations. Pregnant women, youth, children, the elderly and those with disabilities are particularly at risk. Yet women have no platform or space to raise and report these violations to local authorities and to seek justice. It is crucial to engage women in the development of humanitarian response planning, relief and resettlement policy, security policy and to ensure crisis affected women’s voices and demands are acted upon from urgent humanitarian assistance and protection to longer term recovery and resettlement needs. Men, women, boys and girls in IDP camps have lost their family and community member, farms, land, houses, livestock and livelihoods due to the conflict. Many civilians have been trapped in IDP camps unable to move to a secure place and live in continued hardship with basic survival needs unmet, constant fear for their safety and with little hope for the future.

**Strengthening the capacities of women as leaders and decision makers, and providing them with the space recognition and opportunities to participate in peace dialogues will bring Kachin State on the right track.**
future.

**KEY DEMANDS:**

- **The Union Government of Myanmar must decentralize authority, responsibility and accountability** to the Kachin State government to promptly assist in every emergency situation in Kachin State.

- **The Government of Myanmar must ensure full access** for the UN, INGOs, NGOs and CSOs to provide humanitarian assistance to crisis affected populations in Kachin State.

- **Ensure food rations and other life-saving humanitarian assistance** is never to cut during emergency situations.

- **Withdraw military outposts from villages** in order to safeguard civilians.

- **Set up safe and accessible hotline service and complaint mechanisms** for women to report human rights violations, humanitarian and other needs, issues and demands with an accountable follow-up feedback loop from relevant authorities and service providers.

- **Ensure regular inclusive and participatory consultations** with conflict affected populations, especially women, on their needs, issues and demands.

- **Ensure access to justice and provision of psychosocial support** to conflict affected populations in need including victims/survivors of human rights violations and violence.

- **Increase women’s representation and meaningful participation** in relief, resettlement and security planning and policy in Kachin State, including also in IDP camp coordination and management.

- **Strengthening the capacities and promote the awareness of women as leaders** and decision makers, and providing them with the space, recognition and opportunities to participate in peace dialogues in Kachin State.

- **The Government - in collaboration with the UN, INGOs, NGOs and CSOs - must develop a plan and programme to provide compensation and remedial action** to conflict affected populations in Kachin State for the losses and injustice they have endured.

- **Provide women and the overall conflict effected population in Kachin with cash and in-kind support**, skills training, formal job opportunities, market linkages, access to finance, land rights and requisition to promote their sustainable livelihoods, self-reli-
WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

Women have the status as secondary citizens in patriarchal society in Myanmar and are discriminated against in both the private and public sphere, in families, communities and the state. Restrictive socio-cultural gender norms and practices often confine women to the domestic sphere and current laws and policies do not include adequate measures and provisions to ensure women’s equal rights and representation. This prevents women from participating in all aspects of life from the education sector, the labour market, to politics and governance. Women in the work force suffer from unequal wages and limited opportunities to move up the career ladder and take on leadership and senior management positions. Women should be fairly and equitably represented and given the equal opportunity with men to participate in decision making at all levels including in political parties, parliament, policy making, legislation, planning, administration, religious institutions, law enforcement across all topics of the peace process, the economy, education, natural resource management, security, social welfare, relief and resettlement, human rights, religion, development, land, housing and property, among others. If given the opportunity, women have the capacity and willingness to shape the future of the country.

All men, the government and other authorities need to encourage, support and give the floor and space to women to contribute to discussions and decisions to ensure their opinion, voices, thoughts and ideas are brought into practice. Women need to be given more opportunities to obtain higher levels of education, training, confidence and leadership building, and an enabling environment without discrimination in order to be widely involved in every aspect of life and all levels of decision making. This is essential in order to promote their own well-being and long-lasting development, prosperity and

If given the opportunity, women have the capacity and willingness to shape the future of the country.
peace in Kachin State.

KEY DEMANDS:

- **Enhance women’s participation** in elections as voters and electoral candidates and gender-balanced representation in political parties.

- **Increase women’s meaningful participation and equal representation** in governance including in developing policies, laws, strategies, and programmes.

- **Assign more women in leader positions** in the job market across all sectors including through quota systems and other gender-responsive measures.

- **Promote and advocate for gender equality** and women’s empowerment in the media (TV, newspapers, radio, social media).

- **Conduct awareness raising** sessions, advocacy campaigns, and consultations on gender equality and women’s empowerment in Kachin State at the community, village/camp, township, district, and state levels.

- **Create more opportunities, channels and platforms for women**, women’s groups, and networks to speak out and make their voices and demands heard through engagement with the Government, UN, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, and EAOs.

- **Create forums, training opportunities and peer-mentoring** schemes for women to strengthen their leadership
and advocacy skills and confidence.

**WOMEN AND LIVELIHOOD AND THE ECONOMY**

Women in Kachin State are prevented from being economically empowered due to formal and informal gender barriers in society – from restrictive socio-cultural gender norms often confining women to the domestic sphere and in lower positions; gender based violence at home, at work and in public spaces; discriminatory land, property and ownership laws; unequal wages; lack of gender-responsive measures to promote women’s rights and empowerment in the work places including parental leave, child care facilities, zero tolerance for sexual harassment and abuse etc; women’s limited access to education, vocational and financial management skills, among others. The Government, UN, INGOS, NGOs, CSOs and the private sector must ensure women are given the space, opportunities and equal rights to ensure their sustainable livelihoods, self-reliance, financial independence and to contribute to fifty percent of the economy for the economic recovery and resilience of communities and the prosperity and development of Kachin
State and the country as a whole.

**KEY DEMANDS:**

- **Provide and ensure that women have equal access to job opportunities and equal pay for work of equal value.**

  Provide women with more training opportunities on advanced vocation-al skills, entrepreneurship, business management, marketing and financial management.

- **Put in place and strengthen existing measures and revise laws** to ensure women’s equal access to finance and banking.

- **Revise and reform laws** to ensure women’s equal and co-ownership rights for land, property and businesses.

- **Establish women’s economic empowerment ‘watchdog mechanism’** representing all women in Kachin to ensure their voices, issues and challenges are channeled to the Government and other authorities to enable prompt and appropriate responsive action to inform labour law drafting, revisions, implementation and monitoring.

  Hold awareness sessions on gender-equal labour laws and strengthen measures to ensure compliance with the laws at all levels.

- **Conduct awareness sessions and advocacy campaign** at the state, district, township and local level to promote gender-equal division of household work.

- **Promote system of local cultural leaders** to promote women’s economic empowerment through advocacy campaigns and awareness raising using the media and peer-mentoring system.
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND TRAFFICKING

Gender based violence especially against women, girls and boys is prevalent and widespread in Kachin State, with domestic violence as some of the highest forms reported. Women cite the impacts from the conflict including lack of livelihoods, enduring poverty, and the use of drugs and alcohol as key risk factors for increased levels of violence. Sexual violence, including conflict related sexual violence by armed actors, and rape have also been reported as widespread in Kachin State leading to women feeling unsafe and restricting their freedom of movement, mobility and access to services. Prolonged displacement has affected communities’ coping resilience and economic security with high exposure to negative coping mechanisms, exploitation and protection risks and threats including the illegal cross-border trade of drugs, arms and other illicit products and human trafficking into China, especially of women and girls in at-risk border areas and those in IDP camps and in non-government-controlled areas. Search for employment, attempts to escape overcrowded and unsafe living conditions in camps, and cross-border marriage arrangements are among key ways women are lured into human trafficking. This overall scenario puts women at high risk of exploitation, abuse and violence, while there are inadequate systems and measures in place for survivors to seek protection, services and justice but are often further stigmatized and marginalised.

All forms of violence against women should stop and serious action should be taken to hold the perpetrators accountable in accordance with the rule of law. Victims/survivors of all forms of trafficking and gender-based violence require adequate provision of protection, prevention, security, inclusion, rehabilitation and reintegration by the Government.

This overall scenario puts women at high risk of exploitation, abuse and violence, while there are inadequate systems and measures in place for survivors to seek protection, services and justice.
KEY DEMANDS:

• Government, in collaboration with the UN, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, law enforcement and the media, to conduct awareness raising and advocacy campaign at state, township, district and community levels on human trafficking and safe migration, and gender-based violence with a focus on gender aspects particularly impacting women and girls.

• Government to develop and effectively implement a strategy for the promotion of protection, prevention, prosecution and policy to eliminate and address gender-based violence and human trafficking especially of women and girls.

• Establish one-stop-service centres and safe shelters for survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking.

• Increase representation of women in the police force and overall law enforcement and conduct gender sensitization training with law enforcement including focus on gender-based violence and human trafficking.
The Common Charter of Demands has been prepared with kind facilitation and technical support from UN Women Myanmar.
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