

## **Statement from Karen Communities Worldwide**

12<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Today, coinciding with ceasefire negotiations between Burma's military backed government and the Karen National Union (KNU), we are holding traditional peace ceremonies outside Burmese Embassies around the world, and at other venues.

The traditional peace ceremonies are being held to call on the military-backed government to not only to agree a ceasefire, but also engage in dialogue to solve the political problems behind the conflict.

The current ceasefire talks are the sixth time in the past 63 years that official talks have taken place. There have also been many informal discussions. Past negotiations have failed because the Burmese government has always effectively demanded surrender, and has refused to seriously discuss the political problems which are the cause of the conflict.

As Karen refugees we know it is not safe to return to our homeland without a political solution that ensures there will be peace and where our rights and culture will be protected. We have seen how human rights abuses have continued in other areas of Burma where there are ceasefires, and how the dictatorship used the ceasefires to extend its control and try to weaken the ethnic political parties which defended the people. A ceasefire alone tackles the symptoms, not the causes. There must also be political dialogue for a permanent political solution.

The military backed government says it wants to talk peace but it is still attacking Karen villages, still executing unarmed villagers, and has recently jailed Mahn Nyein Maung, a senior KNU leader.

We will be making the following requests:

- A nationwide ceasefire
- Dialogue for a political solution which guarantees ethnic rights and culture.
- Stop attacking Karen and all ethnic people
- Stop military actions in ethnic areas
- Stop human rights violations
- Free all political prisoners, including Mahn Nyein Maung

All Karen want peace, but not peace at the price of surrender that leaves us defenceless against human rights abuses and oppression.

There must be a political solution which guarantees ethnic rights and protects ethnic culture. There must be a political solution where the people of Burma can live peacefully side by side, different but equal.

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**Background:**

More than a hundred-thousand Karen live in refugee camps on the Thailand-Burma border, and tens of thousands more have been resettled around the world by the United Nations. We have fled attacks and human rights abuses by the Burmese Army. The KNU first took up arms to defend the people in 1949. The conflict is now thought to be the world's longest running civil war.

Previous official ceasefire discussions took place in April 1949, February 1960, August 1963, December 1995, Dec 2003 – May 2005 (7 meetings in total from 2003-2005). In Jan 2004 a gentleman's agreement on a ceasefire was agreed between General Bo Mya and General Khin Nyut. It was violated by the Burmese Army and ended when Khin Nyut was arrested in Oct 2004. The Karen National Union has made hundreds of calls for ceasefire negotiations in the past 63 years, almost all of which were completely ignored. The KNU has also implemented two unilateral one-day ceasefires on the UN Day of Peace, but the Burmese Army ignored all calls to join the ceasefire.