

January 22, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

RE: Rape and Murder of Kachin Baptist Women

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are deeply saddened and angered about the brutal gang-rape and murder of Maran Lu Ra (aged 20) and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin (aged 21), in the Shabuk Kawhngghka village in northern Shan State, Myanmar, on January 20, 2015. The murder of these two women, volunteer teachers from the Kachin Baptist Convention of Myanmar, is the most recent in a pattern of sexual violence committed upon the women of Myanmar by the Burma Army. While we support the steps taken by the Burmese government towards democracy, we continue to be greatly concerned by repeated reports of the rape and torture of Kachin and other ethnic minority women, and the apparent ability of the military to carry out gross human rights violations with impunity.

We affirm the State Department's call to Myanmar authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice, as per spokesperson's Jen Psaki's daily press briefing on January 21. We also affirm Secretary of State John Kerry's meeting with President Thein Sein and other Burma government officials in August 2014, in which the Secretary of State raised concerns about the need for Burma to address human rights issues. President Obama, in November 2014, also called for a continued commitment to human rights in Burma. There is, indeed, great need for the United States government to continue to put pressure upon the Burmese government to address human rights violations.

In January, 2014, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) published a report documenting over 100 cases of sexual violence against women and girls from 2010 to 2014; the majority of those cases were linked to military offensives. The report stated that this number likely only represents a fraction of cases that actually occurred. In November, 2014, the WLB published a new report that documented an additional 14 cases of gang-rape, rape and attempted sexual assault between January and June 2014, again noting that it represents only a portion of actual incidences of sexual violence. (Women's League of Burma, "If they had hope, they would speak: The ongoing use of state-sponsored sexual violence in Burma's ethnic communities," November 2014.) Although the Burma government signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in June 2014, insufficient, if any, actions have been implemented; the Burma government has not followed through on improving transparency and accountability.

American Baptist Women's Ministries, with a deep and historical engagement in issues regarding the oppression and exploitation of women worldwide, and with an equally deep and historical relationship with the Baptist women of Burma, calls upon the U.S. government to uphold its commitment to human rights as follows:

"... to bring good news to the poor... proclaim release to the captives... let the oppressed go free..."
(Luke 4:18-19)

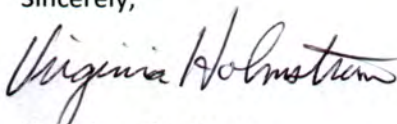
Pressure the government of Burma to

- Reform Burma's legal system to reflect norms of international law, especially regarding the human rights of women and ethnic communities, as well as meeting its obligations as signatories to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.
- Provide sufficient human and financial resources to ensure effective implementation of the Burma government's National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, published in 2013 but with little action taken to date;
- Ensure accountability and transparency of investigations into reports of sexual violence by the Burmese military army and ensure justice for the survivors, and to include provisions to ensure these in the National Ceasefire Agreements negotiated with ethnic groups;
- Establish effective judicial and non-judicial mechanisms to investigate human rights abuses, particularly those related to sexual violence, including an independent international investigation and independent national courts;
- Ensure that women's voices are heard at every level of political dialogue.

We commend the State Department for its attention to democratic reform in Burma and its stated commitment to human rights issues. However, we urge increased attention to human rights reforms in Burma, and the cessation of the use of rape as a weapon of war, as the United States continues forward in economic agreements with the government of Burma.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

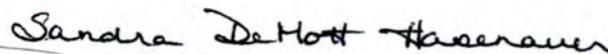
Sincerely,



Virginia Holmstrom
Executive Director



Patricia Stratton
President



Rev. Sandra DeMott Hasenauer
Associate Executive Director

Cc:

Derek J. Mitchell, U.S. Ambassador to Burma

Judith Beth Cefkin, Senior Advisor for Burma

Patsy Davis, Executive Director, Baptist World Alliance Women's Department

Dr. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary, American Baptist Churches USA

Aundreia Alexander, Esq., Associate General Secretary for Action and Advocacy for Justice and Peace,
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