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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Armed conflict and human rights violations in Myanmar

Society for Threatened Peoples welcomes that two soldiers will be tried at a court-martial for the murder of a Karen woman. The trial has been announced by a military spokesman at the end of July 2020. The woman was killed on July 17, 2020, in her bar in Papun District in Karen State when she had a quarrel with one of the soldiers who tried to steal her jewelry. She was killed by a shot of a weapon of one of the soldiers. During the following week thousands of Karen civilians staged protests in front of the military base to urge an end to impunity for murders by soldiers.

Karen State has a long history of army violence against civilians during armed conflict. Thousands of Karen women and girls have experienced sexual violence by soldiers. Arbitrary arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings by security forces in ethnic minority conflicts have been documented for decades by human rights organizations, but impunity still prevails.

More than 4,650 Karen people from 114 villages protested on July 28, 2020, against the violence of military forces and demanded justice and an end to military killings of civilians in their areas. It was the second protest within one week. They called for the withdrawal of military bases in their areas and urged more transparency in investigations of military violence. Since 2018, the reconstruction of a road by the military has caused tensions between the army and the armed ethnic movement Karen National Union (KNU). The local Karen population suffers from human rights violations of the army of Myanmar caused by this longstanding conflict. Since decades KNU fights for more autonomy for Karen State in the framework of the territorial frontiers of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Despite the fact that KNU signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, both sides still are in conflict over territorial disputes.

In northern Shan State Myanmar's military and the Shan State Army, the armed wing of Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), have signed a state-level ceasefire agreement. Despite the ceasefire the local population suffers from numerous clashes between the army and the Shan State Army. On July 24, 2020, more than 200 Shan fled their village Nar Ohn following a clash between the regular Myanmar Army and the Shan State Army. On June 28, 2020, the Myanmar Army shot and killed a man and injured two others in Pan Kin village in northern Shan State. The civilians were shot during a clash between the army and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS). The military has denied any civilian casualties, but the villager U Sai Maung reported that he was forced by soldiers to work as a guide. With hands tied behind his back, he had to guide them. Before they left, he was beaten by the soldiers and left unconscious on the road. A passing monk finally rescued him.

Only a few days before some 700 people fled ten villages in the area following clashes between the army and RCSS. A 55-year-old woman was shot by soldiers. Despite her wounds she succeeded to run to the next hospital. Several villagers blamed the military for being abused as forced porters.

In Rakhine State since the genocide against the Rohingya minority has escalated with more than 850,000 people fleeing from violence to neighboring Bangladesh in the year 2017, the suffering of the civilian population has escalated due to more violent conflict between the Myanmar Army and the so-called "Arakan Army". Fighting has killed at least 257 civilians and injured 570 others between December 2018 and May 2020. Many people were killed by stray bullets or artillery fire. Others died in military custody under suspicious conditions. Or they were caught in crossfire between the conflict parties or they were killed by airstrikes by the Myanmar military. Among the victims were many women and children of Rakhine or Chin origin. Satellite images are proofing that many villages of ethnic minority people were burned down. Regular soldiers arbitrarily arrested civilians in Rakhine State for perceived connections with the Arakan Army. Some of them died due to torture in custody. Many civilians are blaming the military for the deliberate confiscation or destruction of private property. At least 100,000 people have been displaced following fighting in northern Rakhine State and Chin State.

All conflict parties are preventing humanitarian aid from reaching civilians in need. It's extremely difficult for humanitarian agencies to get access to the suffering civilian population. According to international humanitarian law, conflict parties must allow and facilitate the rapid passage of humanitarian aid for civilians in need and ensure the freedom of movement of humanitarian workers.

There are no credible indications that the Myanmar Government is committed to end the persecution of the Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine State. There are no meaningful attempts to end impunity for genocide and crimes against humanity against Rohingya and to bring those responsible for the crimes, before justice.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of Myanmar:
- to stop violence of the security forces against civilians especially in ethnic minority regions and to end impunity for these crimes,

- to ensure free access for humanitarian workers to all people in need,
 - to declare a ceasefire in Rakhine State,
 - to end the persecution of Rohingya people and to ensure the respect of their human rights,
 - to stop impunity for genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya minority.
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