



# Chin Human Rights Organization

P.O. Box 202, Phrasing Post Office, Chiang Mai, Thailand 50205

Tel: +66.53.210.302

[www.chro.ca](http://www.chro.ca) [info@chro.ca](mailto:info@chro.ca)

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**PRESS RELEASE: for immediate release**

**Burma:**

## **Drop charges against Chin activists; end impunity for sexual violence**

**[Chiang Mai, Thailand]** The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) today condemned the Government of Burma for pursuing legal proceedings against 8 Chin activists who demonstrated against sexual violence perpetrated by Burma Army soldiers, and failing to deliver justice for Chin victims of sexual violence. CHRO urged the Burmese authorities to immediately and unconditionally drop the charges against the activists, and reiterated its long-standing call for an independent and impartial international mechanism to investigate serious human rights violations in Burma, including sexual violence, in order to deter further violations and help end the culture of impunity.

On 10 June, a 55 year-old woman from Rezua sub-township in the Matupi township area of Chin State was brutally beaten during an attempted rape by Burma Army soldier Private Myo Thura Kyaw from Light Infantry Battalion No. 269. It is unclear what action if any is being taken against the perpetrator. Rezua locals reported to CHRO that they have heard that Private Myo Thura Kyaw may face charges in military court in Matupi. To date it is not possible to verify this, or if any further action will in fact be taken.

In a related development, Burma Army Tactical Commander Colonel Naing Lin Tun staged a public ceremony in Rezua – apparently intended to appease local people - during which he presented the victim's husband with 15 packets of noodles and 100,000 kyats.

### ***Threats and intimidation of Chin activists***

On 15 June, activists from the Zotung Women's Organization (ZWO) in Rezua sub-township applied to the Rezua police station for permission to hold a demonstration in protest at the incident. Two days later, Ha Mang, Rezua sub-township administration officer, called more than 100 local women to Rezua sub-township administration office on the pretext of organizing an awareness raising program for women. Upon arriving there, the women learned that there was no such program. Instead Ha Mang threatened the women, warning that they would throw away Rezua's chances of being given State-

funded development projects if they went ahead with the demonstration. He reportedly urged the women to forgive the Burma Army soldier.

Major Aung Thu Win - Commander of Light Infantry Battalion No. 269 and the alleged perpetrator's commanding officer - was also at the meeting. According to the women present at the meeting, Major Aung Thu Win said, "We soldiers cannot bring our wives along with us to our duty station, and we sometimes lose control. We will not let similar incidents happen again. We do a lot for the people but we are never appreciated for our good deeds."

The activists from ZWO were not granted permission to hold the demonstration, but went ahead with it on 23 June, in spite of such threats and intimidation. In Matupi town, activists from the Matupi Women's Organization (MWO) applied for official permission to hold a demonstration from their police station, but were also refused. They went ahead with their demonstration as planned on 24 June.

Shortly afterwards, in apparent retaliation for proceeding with the demonstrations, four activists from Rezia and four from Matupi were summoned to their local police stations and charged under Article 18 of "The Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act", which carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison.

Local people in Rezia sub-township requested the police in Rezia to withdraw the charges against the four women leaders. Rezia sub-township police officer Thein Zaw Hlaing reportedly responded that the order to file the charges came from Chin State Chief Minister Hung Ngai, so it is impossible for Rezia police station to drop the charges. Ethnic Chin Chief Minister Hung Ngai is a former Brigadier-General from the Burma Army. On 28 June, women leaders and Christian pastors met with Chief Minister Hung Ngai in Matupi town. He reportedly repeated the warning not to hold this kind of demonstration, as it would result in a ban on the Matupi area receiving development aid.

### ***Ongoing trials of 8 Chin activists***

Activists from ZWO who led the demonstration in Rezia – Ngun Chin Par, Sui Sui Kyi, Kaw Htwe, and Khin Khin Zi – first appeared in court on 4 July. They are due to appear in Matupi District Court again today, and have also been summoned to appear on 22 July.

Meanwhile, the trial began in Matupi yesterday for two men and two women, Thang Zing (F) and Khin Thluai Par (F) of MWO, and Maung Han (M) and Tei Mang (M) of the Matupi Youth Association (MYA), who all spoke at the demonstration in Matupi. The judge postponed the case and ordered them to appear in court again today.

Thang Zing from MWO told CHRO, “All the people here know that this horrible incident took place, and that we are standing on the side of truth. Yet we are being prosecuted for standing for the truth. There is no rule of law and no human security for our people.”

All eight Chin activists have so far avoided detention, as local people have banded together to provide the requisite bail bonds.

### ***No peace without justice***

CHRO’s Advocacy Director Rachel Fleming said, “This most recent sexual violence case in Rezia follows the same pattern as those documented by CHRO at the height of military dictatorship: very violent, and committed with apparent impunity. It is abhorrent that the authorities will go to such lengths to threaten and silence activists who are bravely speaking out about this issue, while at the same time failing to deliver justice for victims of sexual violence.”

Including this recent case, CHRO has documented five sexual violence cases since President Thein Sein’s government took power in March 2011, three of which have been committed since the initial ceasefire agreement was signed between the government and ethnic armed resistance group the Chin National Front in May 2012. All but one of the incidents were perpetrated by Burma Army soldiers. Burma signed the United Nations Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict earlier in June, but no concrete action has been taken.

Rachel Fleming continued, “This issue goes right to the heart of Burma’s peace process. How can ethnic women ever feel truly safe while Burma Army soldiers, who appear to have a licence to rape with impunity, are stationed nearby? There needs to be a withdrawal of Burma Army troops from towns and villages in ethnic States as part of the peace process. Impunity has to be addressed, including via reform of the 2008 Constitution. There can be no lasting peace without justice for such crimes.”

-ENDS-

#### **Media interviews:**

Rachel Fleming, CHRO Advocacy Director (English): +66862110732

Mai Thin Yu Mon, CHRO Program Officer (Burmese, Lai & English): +959420045830

#### **Notes to Editors:**

1. Like the Kachin languages, Chin languages use Roman script. When Chin names are transliterated from Burmese into English, the spelling is changed significantly and this sometimes renders Chin names unrecognizable. Please refer to the English language version of the press release for the correct spelling of the names in English.

2. Matupi township (which includes Rezua sub-township) is a remote area of Chin State, with poor communications infrastructure. The area is also heavily militarized, with seven Burma Army camps in the area, including in Rezua sub-township and Matupi town. CHRO will continue to monitor the situation, and will provide updates when possible.
3. The Zotung are a sub-group of ethnic Chin who mainly live in the Matupi township area, but also in other parts of Chin State and elsewhere in Burma.
4. Of the five sexual violence cases documented by CHRO since March 2011, four were committed by Burma Army soldiers, and one murder was allegedly committed by a Meitei insurgent from Manipur in Northeast India. For details of the other four cases, please visit <http://www.chro.ca/index.php/publications/rhododendron> See *Burma Army Soldier Abducted Local Girl to Become Wife*, Rhododendron News published by CHRO, March - April 2011 edition; *Soldier Raped Chin Woman in Kyauktaw*, Rhododendron News July – August 2012 edition; *Suspect in Killing of Chin Woman Identified but Still at Large in Burma*, Rhododendron News July – August 2012 edition; and *Soldiers Attempted Rape, Threatened Villagers in Chin State*, Rhododendron News, January – February 2013 edition.