

MNHRC Must Take Stand on Extrajudicial Killings of Rakhine Villagers

14 May 2019

We, the 24 organizations of the CSO Working Group on MNHRC Reform, call on the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) to act independently of the Myanmar military, and take firm, decisive action in regards to gross human rights violations committed in ethnic, conflict-affected areas. We are particularly disappointed that the MNHRC has unquestioningly accepted the Myanmar military's version of events after six ethnic Rakhine villagers were shot dead while in custody of the military, despite on the ground reports that their killings were unlawful.

On 30 April, 2019, the Myanmar military detained all male villagers between the ages of 15 and 50 from Kyauk Tan Village, Rathaedaung Township, Rakhine State on suspicion of having ties with the ethnic armed organization, the Arakan Army (AA). On 2 May, six of the detainees were shot dead and at least eight were injured. The Myanmar military has sought to absolve itself of any liability, claiming that the actions of their soldiers were in self-defense. Yet according to eyewitnesses, the soldiers fired indiscriminately into the crowd after one of the detainees started yelling and trying to run away. This is just the latest in a series of allegations that the Myanmar military is committing gross human rights violations throughout northern Rakhine State as it seeks to flush out the AA. Just last month, another three villagers from Latka Village, Mrauk Oo Township died in custody, after 27 people had been detained on suspicion of being part of the AA. The military claimed the causes of death were suicide, heart attack, and withdrawal from drug addiction, but the rushed cremation and the fact the families were not notified of their death points to extrajudicial killing.

In this context it is vital that the MNHRC fulfils its mandate as a national human rights institution to conduct a full and transparent investigation into the deaths of these civilians. Yet in its statement, dated, 3 May, 2019, it simply echoes the military's version of events, stating that "during detention, about 2am, May 2, 2019, some detainees started shouting and attempting to attack the security force. Therefore, the security forces fired to defend themselves and to separate the mob which caused 6 deaths, 8 injuries and 4 missing." There was no attempt by the MNHRC to verify the claims of the Myanmar military, which contradict what eyewitnesses and other detainees have said what has happened.

A similar statement was made by the MNHRC to Parliament in May 2018, when two Kachin men who, according to witnesses, were arrested while tending to buffalo in January 2018, were later found buried after being executed by the Myanmar military. A Kachin Independence Army (KIA) uniform had been put on one of the men. Despite medical reports that said they could have been tortured, the MNHRC stated that they were KIA soldiers, and had been killed in battle, contradicting all reports and testimony from the people on the ground that they were merely civilians and the Myanmar military had taken them away while they were in the fields.

In times of armed conflict, where unspeakable human rights abuses are being committed against civilians, Myanmar needs a strong, effective and independent national human rights institution. In the cases outlined above, the MNHRC has been the opposite, unquestioningly siding with the Myanmar military's version of events, despite the decades of misinformation and propaganda that the military has disseminated to try and hide its abuses. At best, the MNHRC is whitewashing the military's crimes, and at worst, is complicit in them. We therefore urge the MNHRC to conduct a full and transparent investigation into the killings of Kyauk Tan Village. It must accompany such an investigation and any

subsequent recommendations with public pressure to ensure that relevant parties, especially the Myanmar military, are held accountable. It is time for the MNHRC to show whether it is on the side of human rights, or the Myanmar military.

Member organizations of CSO Working Group on MNHRC Reform

1. Action Committee for Democracy Development – ACDD
2. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners – AAPP
3. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters – HRDP
4. Athan - Freedom of Expression Activist Organization
5. Burma Monitor (Research and Monitoring) – BM
6. Equality Myanmar – EQMM
7. Future Light Center - FLC
8. Genuine People’s Servants – GPS
9. Generation Wave – GW
10. Human Rights Education Network – HREN
11. Human Rights Foundation of Monland – HURFOM
12. Kachin Women’s Association Thailand – KWAT
13. Karen Human Rights Group – KHRG
14. Karenni Human Rights Group – KnHRG
15. Loka Ahlinn (Social Development Network)
16. Metta Campaign – Mandalay
17. Myanmar People’s Alliance (Shan State)
18. Pa-O Youth Organization – PYO
19. Progressive Voice – PV
20. Smile Education and Development Foundation – Smile
21. Synergy (Social Harmony Organization)
22. Ta’ang Women’s Organization – TWO
23. The Seagull
24. Yangon Watch

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Editor’s Note:

The CSO Working Group on MNHRC Reform was formed in 2019 and advocates for reform of the MNHRC so it is an effective, independent, and transparent national human rights institution that promotes and protects the rights of all people of Myanmar in line with the Paris Principles.