

Statement (Myanmar): March 8, 2024, International Women’s Day

Friday 8 March 2024, by [Women’s Peace Network](#) (Date first published: 8 March 2024).

This International Women’s Day, women continue to bear the brunt of the world’s failures to respect the rights of all. Indeed, the world’s efforts to end sexual and gender-based violence, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, collective punishment, gender apartheid, femicide, and genocide against women of all backgrounds remain disappointingly slow, absent, and even discriminatory.



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In Myanmar, such decades-long inaction is now further endangering the lives of women. Over three years since its attempted coup, the Burmese military continues to commit atrocities in an attempt to expand and reinforce its unlawful and illegal control over the country. The military continues to use foreign-funded arms supplies and airstrikes to kill civilians and destroy civilian objects - murdering at least 822 women. The military has also destroyed the country’s limited rule of law, and used its sham legal system to arbitrarily arrest 5,427 women, sentence 52 to life, and 16 to death; as well as used its genocidal policies against Rohingya to arbitrarily arrest at least 1,132 of their women. At least 3,909 women political prisoners interned in squalid prisons are currently being exposed to the military’s sexual violence, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, denial of proper legal support, denial of medical treatment, denial of essential commodities, including food and sanitary napkins, and other heinous acts. Beyond the prison walls, women are also being targeted for rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence as they flee the junta’s aerial bombings and scorched-earth campaigns to even more vulnerable conditions.

Amid the ongoing crisis, **the Burmese military’s recent, forced conscription law is clearly another one of its attempts to inflict collective punishment on the country’s people.** The military has already used the law as supposed grounds to indiscriminately abduct civilians, including young women and internally displaced persons. Those who enlist will likely be subjected to torture, sexual violence, and other abuses, and be weaponized by the junta as cannon fodder or human shields in its commission of atrocity crimes.

As Myanmar’s crisis forces many more civilians to flee, **it indeed becomes the responsibility of its neighboring countries and regional community to provide them safety, protection, and**

humanitarian needs. However, **that has yet to become the reality for Myanmar's over 1.3 million refugees** – more than half of whom [are](#) women and children. Women and children also composed nearly three-quarters of the Rohingya who were forced into deadly sea crossings on the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in 2023: the "[deadliest year](#)." From Thailand and Bangladesh, to Indonesia and Malaysia, these women refugees remain denied full access to safety and protection, asylum or third-country resettlement, shelter, food and clean water, clothing, basic and maternal healthcare, and other life-saving needs and facilities. For many, their legal status also compromises their prospects in their host countries, denying them formal employment, education or other skill-building opportunities, and even access to hospitals. Outspoken women face backlash: surveillance and doxing campaigns target women human rights defenders resisting the attempted coup in exile, while kidnapping, extortion and other attacks target Rohingya women subverting their community's norms in Bangladesh's refugee camps. Despite such life-threatening risks, women continue to be denied comprehensive legal support and other pathways to protect themselves. As a result, many risk indefinite detention in their host countries, forcible deportation to Myanmar and – for Rohingya women refugees in particular – hate speech and a growing risk of atrocities.

To "[inspire inclusion](#)," we must actively build an environment that will be conducive to it. Toward that inclusion, ethnic and religious minority women have long worked to end the impunity that for decades enabled the commission of atrocity crimes against them. Today, people across the country follow these women in their fight for a truly inclusive federal democracy. **The world too should be inspired by the women of Myanmar, and act in their favor immediately.**

Therefore, this International Women's Day, we call for the following:

- **Governments and donors to provide direct financial, material, and technical assistance** to women human rights defenders and women-led civil society and community-based organizations, especially by implementing flexible funding mechanisms with maximum adaptability and optimal support, as a step toward increased women's participation in politics and sustained women's leadership.
- **Countries in South and Southeast Asia to ensure Myanmar refugee women full and reliable access to asylum and protection**, including options for resettlement to third countries, access to humanitarian needs, safe houses and shelter, food, education, employment, and healthcare, as well as access to domestic justice mechanisms and mental health and psychosocial support tailored to their unique needs and conditions. Immediate and safe disembarkment from their deadly sea crossings, deployment of search-and-rescue missions, as well as measures to prevent hate speech and disinformation must also be provided to Rohingya refugee women in particular.
- **The U.N. Security Council to advance accountability efforts on Myanmar and address the junta's failure to comply with [resolution 2669 \(2022\)](#)**, including by issuing a strong, binding resolution to follow up on it that refers the situation of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court, and issues targeted economic sanctions, as well as an arms and aviation fuel embargo, on the Burmese military. The Council should also hold a special meeting to discuss non-compliance of the [provisional measures](#) that were issued by *The Gambia v. Myanmar* at the International Court of Justice.
- **The international community to meaningfully consult and engage with women from diverse backgrounds**, including women human rights defenders, women representatives of the Burmese pro-democracy movement, ethnic and religious minority women, sexual minorities, young women and girls, and victims and survivors of atrocities, when addressing the crisis in Myanmar and pursuing justice and accountability.

