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Myanmar: Three years on, conflict continues in Kachin state

Three years after the Myanmar armed forces resumed offensive military operations in Kachin state, Amnesty International joins human rights defenders and civil society organizations to call for an immediate end to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The continued fighting and reports of crimes under international law and human rights violations allegedly committed by the Myanmar Army raise serious questions about commitment to human rights reforms in the country and threaten ongoing efforts to negotiate a nationwide ceasefire.

On 9 June 2011, the Myanmar Army attacked the main ethnic Kachin opposition group – the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) – ending a 17-year ceasefire. The attack came after the KIA refused to transform into a Border Guard Force and submit to the control of the Myanmar Army, as required by the 2008 Constitution.

Since then, fighting has continued between the two sides to the conflict, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes, many of them seeking refuge in internally displaced person (IDP) camps along the Myanmar-China border. At least 96,000 people are currently believed to be displaced as a result of the conflict, some of them victims of multiple attacks and displacement.

The humanitarian situation of IDPs remains grave, and there are ongoing concerns about conditions in IDP camps, including with regard to access to shelter, clean water and sanitation. The arrival of the rainy season – bringing with it higher risks of flooding and water-borne diseases – is also a major cause for concern. In addition, humanitarian organizations continue to face restrictions in carrying out their work, exacerbating the already vulnerable situation of the growing displaced population.

Amnesty International calls urgently on the Myanmar authorities to ensure that humanitarian aid organizations have full and unfettered access to all displaced persons in Kachin state and elsewhere in the country.

Since the resumption of fighting in 2011, Amnesty International has received ongoing reports of human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Myanmar armed forces in Kachin state, and parts of Northern Shan state. They include reports of unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, and rape and other crimes of sexual violence. The organization has also received reports of human rights abuses committed by the Kachin Independence Army.

In his final report to the United Nations Human Rights Council, outgoing Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, highlighted concerns about violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, noting that such violations continue where there are ongoing military operations. He further noted that there is “no progress in tackling the impunity under which the military forces currently operate” (The report can be accessed at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/129/94/PDF/G1412994.pdf?OpenElement>).

Amnesty International calls on the Myanmar authorities to ensure that all members of the Myanmar armed forces adhere to their obligations to respect and protect human rights. Furthermore, the authorities must investigate promptly, impartially and effectively all reports and complaints of

violations or abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, with a view to bringing those suspected of criminal responsibility, including commanders and other superiors, to justice before ordinary civilian courts in fair proceedings. As a first step, anyone suspected of such violations must be immediately suspended from frontline duties.