



It is Time to Sanction General Min Aung Hlaing

Statement by the Karen Organization of America

April 25, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
United State Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW, DC 20520

Senator Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United State Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator James Risch
Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
United State Senate
483 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Senator McConnell & Senator Risch

On March 20, four US senators wrote an open letter to you and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. The senators urged the State Department to invoke the Magnitsky Act and implement US sanctions on Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. As Commander-in-Chief of Burma's Armed Forces, the general stands accused of orchestrating campaigns of genocide, mass murder, and human rights abuses against Rohingya, Kachin, Shan, Karen and other ethnic peoples in Burma.

The Karen Organization of America represents an estimated 70,000 ethnic Karen refugees who fled Burma for the United States. We fully endorse the senators' call to sanction General Min Aung Hlaing, and we further urge the US government to seek international prosecution of the general and other high-ranking officers for their crimes. Karen people in Burma have suffered systematic abuses and atrocities at the hands of the Burmese military since the 1950s. Today, the cycle of military violence and abuse continues unabated, despite the transition to a quasi-civilian government. Presiding over the carnage and political impasse is Min Aung Hlaing.

The human rights situation in Burma is urgent and getting worse. The United States must demonstrate its commitment to promoting democracy, peace, and human rights. Therefore, the Karen Organization of America supports calls to impose US sanctions on General Min Aung Hlaing for the following reasons:

- **He controls an army that is guilty of crimes against humanity across Burma**

The Burmese military is one of the worst human rights violators in the world. Burmese soldiers routinely murder and torture civilians; commit rape and sexual violence; use civilians as human shields, minesweepers, and forced labor; and destroy the villages, food sources, and lands of civilian populations. These are not the actions of rogue soldiers; rather, they have been standard military policy ever since the so-called Four Cuts campaigns against Karen villages intensified in the 1970s.

As the UN Fact-Finding Mission demonstrated, military atrocities against the Rohingya and other ethnic groups in Burma originate at the highest level of command. General Min Aung Hlaing has denied that Rohingya people exist and has spoken of the "Bengali problem" as an "unfinished job." In 2018, the United States sanctioned four regional commanders. The Commander-in-Chief is the only general named by the Fact-Finding Mission who has yet to face US sanctions. It is now high time to impose sanctions on the man ultimately responsible for Burmese military abuses, not only against the Rohingya, but against all ethnic peoples across Burma.

- **Congress has recognized genocide against Rohingya**

In December 2018, Congress passed a resolution recognizing Burmese military crimes against the Rohingya as genocide. This follows similar declarations by Canada and France. As per Article 1 of the Genocide Convention, these states have a legal and moral obligation to seek criminal prosecution of those responsible and act to prevent further genocide against all ethnic

peoples in Burma. To that end, Congress has urged the President to "impose additional sanctions on senior members of the Burmese military and security forces who are responsible for genocide and human rights abuses, including Tatmadaw Commander-In-Chief Min Aung Hlaing."

- **Lack of action encourages Burmese military impunity and endless cycles of abuse**

Decades of impunity for atrocities against ethnic communities, including the Karen, led the generals to calculate that they could commit genocide against the Rohingya and get away with it. Failure to implement meaningful sanctions against the Commander-in-Chief and other senior officers will only embolden them to commit further crimes against humanity in their ongoing efforts to crush all resistance and achieve total domination. The general's response to international criticism so far has been to deny all wrongdoing and block UN investigators. It is time to move from words to actions befitting the crime of genocide. Implementing US sanctions on General Min Aung Hlaing and other top officers is the first step.

- **He is the main obstacle to peace and political reform in Burma**

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing is the most powerful person in Burma today. He controls not only all the armed forces, but the police, border security, and most of the civil service. He also appoints 25 percent of members of parliament from among the military's ranks. These provisions are enshrined in the 2008 military-drafted constitution, and the general has consistently blocked all attempts by Aung San Suu Kyi's government to fulfill their campaign promise of reforming this constitution.

General Min Aung Hlaing's hardline stance has led the country's faltering peace process into a gridlock. He has dismissed ethnic peoples' aspirations for self-determination as "unrealistic," and in October 2018 he demanded that ethnic groups surrender their arms before further political negotiations could take place. Shortly thereafter, Karen National Union and Shan State Army, the two largest groups involved in these negotiations, announced they were suspending further participation.

Meanwhile, war and associated abuses have intensified in Kachin and northern Shan States despite the current 4-month truce. The military has launched new offensives in Rakhine State, this time against the Arakan Army. In Karen State, the military routinely violates the so-called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, shelling civilian areas and provoking skirmishes with Karen soldiers.

The Burmese military, under the control of General Min Aung Hlaing, remains the single greatest obstacle to peace, democracy, and respect for fundamental human rights in Burma. Every effort must be made to weaken the military's hold on the country. Sanctions against Senior General Min Aung Hlaing would send a signal that the United States is committed to honoring victims of atrocities, upholding human rights, and promoting peace and democracy in Burma.

About KOA

More than 70000 Karen refugees from Burma have resettled across the United States, the majority arriving in the late 2000s. The Karen Organization of America is an umbrella organization that represents Karen people in the United States and promotes community development, youth education, human rights, and democracy.

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