

Open Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry

From Shan Community Based Organizations

August 7, 2014

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We wish to alert you to the escalating military operations by Burmese government troops in central Shan State, which are destabilizing the current peace process, and threatening the lives of innocent civilians.

Since June 2014, about 3,000 Burmese government troops have been deployed to Ke See, Murng Hsu and Tangyan townships, to seize territories of the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N), in violation of an existing ceasefire agreement. Hundreds of shells have been fired in civilian areas, causing terror and fresh displacement.

We are now gravely concerned for the security of over 800 villagers, including 300 recently displaced, in Wan Warp village, Ke See township. Over 500 heavily armed Burmese government troops are encamped in and around Wan Warp, restricting villagers' movement and refusing to withdraw until today.

The IDPs fled to Wan Warp on June 26 when the Burma Army began firing shells from their village, Wan Pasaung, about 1 kilometer west of Wan Warp. After two days of shelling, the Burmese troops were unable to capture the strategic Ta Pasaung River crossing, so they have blockaded the area, building over 30 new military outposts on villagers' lands.

The troops in Wan Pasaung have been looting livestock and possessions of villagers, and patrolling through farmlands, destroying fences and letting cattle trample crops. Wan Pasaung is now completely deserted, and the villagers are forbidden to return to their homes even to collect their belongings.

The 300 IDPs are sheltering in Wan Warp temple, relying on donations of food. Troops are guarding the IDPs, and are also camped in the village primary school, instilling fear among over 100 children attending classes.

This aggressive expansion into Shan ceasefire areas, endangering and displacing civilians, throws further doubt on claims by the Burmese government that it is seeking a peaceful settlement to the ethnic conflict. We also deplore the huge costs of this offensive, with a single day of shelling costing hundreds of thousands of dollars of the national budget.

During your visit to Naypyidaw, we therefore request you to raise concerns about this military operation, and to urge President Thein Sein to immediately stop all military offensives and begin withdrawal of troops from this area of Shan State and other ethnic areas, in order to build confidence in the peace process.

We also urge the United States to suspend military-to-military engagement with the Burmese government, to convey disapproval of its continued aggression against the ethnic peoples.

Sincerely,

Shan Community Based Organizations, including

- Migrant Students Group
- Migrant Workers Federation
- Shan Human Rights Foundation
- Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization
- Shan State Development Foundation
- Shan State Organization
- Shan Students Union (Thailand)
- Shan Women's Action Network
- Shan Youth Network Group
- Shan Youth Organization (Taunggyi)
- Shan Youth Power
- Tai Literature and Culture Society
- Tai Youth Network
- Workers Solidarity Association

Contact Persons:

Ying Harn Fah	+66 89 262 7848
Sai Hseng Mong	+95 93 357 7767
Sai Hor Hseng	+66 93 264 9487

Attachments:

1. Statement by the Shan Human Rights Foundation, July 10, 2014: Burmese government must stop new military operation against ceasefire group in Northern Shan State
2. Map of new Burma Army deployment in Wan Warp, Ke See
3. Photos of Burma Army activities during current offensive in Ke See