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Message from WLB

Lack of democracy and peace and a deep-rooted mistrust among the ethnic nationalities in Burma are the result of 40 years of military rule and 50 years of civil war. Oppression and injustice suffered under military rule are the root causes of violence and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by the women of Burma and their families. Militarization over generations in Burma has diminished the role of women in political life.

Working against war and violence, we are seeking to build trust and mutual understanding among ourselves and the community. Our goal is to build peace amongst women, our families, communities and the political movement, with the aim of achieving genuine national reconciliation in Burma.

We believe that the most ethical and effective way to achieve our goal of peace in Burma is through the empowerment of women in our societies, the participation of women in politics and ensuring a gender-sensitive political agenda in Burma's political processes. Many women from many women's organizations from Burma have worked, and continue to work hard, to re-create spaces for women's empowerment and political involvement. To that end we are embarking on intensive programs to advance the role of women through capacity building and networking.

This first activity report details our initial achievements and activities that were carried out from 1998 to 2001 in accordance with the aims and objectives of the League. We hope that those who read the report will recognize our efforts and lend us their support and solidarity in our future work, enabling us to promote the participation of women in political life, especially within the process of political transition in Burma.

We appreciate all the support we have received from our community, and local and international friends. We believe that your on-going support and all our collective efforts will bring us to our goal of lasting peace and democracy in Burma.

We are also deeply grateful to the Global Fund for Women for helping us with financial support to publish this report, and to Mary O'Kane for her invaluable technical assistance and editing.

WLB

January 2004

Historical context and formation of the WLB

The many women's political and welfare organizations that now exist in displaced communities around Burma's borderlands contrasts starkly with the few state controlled women's associations permitted to operate inside Burma. The formation of the WLB in December 1999 is significant because it consolidates progress made by women's organizations in their work towards building a movement unique to needs and ambitions of women from Burma.

While some of border-based women's organizations are continuations of women's associations that were formed for ethno-political reasons as early as the 1950's, for example the Karen Women's Organizations, others have emerged since the mid 1990's and early 2000. Women's organizations continue to form today.

Each women's organization has its own complex path of establishment, development and evolution of ideology that has been informed by displacement, chosen purpose and position in relation to the States they encounter and the Burmese Opposition Movement in the borderlands. Some organizations' constituent members are based in refugee camps, other organizations are embedded in communities existing as migrant workers or are political dissidents. All organizations involve and represent women who are internally displaced and in conflict areas inside Burma – acknowledging that these categories are broad and overlap considerably. Importantly, the emergence of women's organizations from Burma occurred in ways characteristic of the deep politico-ethnic divides that inform the Opposition Movement in general, initially separating them and severely limiting communication between them.

Particularly since the mid 1990's the imperative to prioritize women's rights and empowerment over ethnic divides grew within various women's organizations. Resistance from the male dominated leadership of the Burmese Opposition Movement to women's interests was one reason that led to a realization amongst some women political leaders that for women's rights and agendas to be included in political processes, a united women's voice is necessary.

With this goal in mind, some women political activist leaders began to approach other women's organizations and in 1998, the first Women's Organizations of Burma Conference was held. This conference proved to be an important landmark in the process leading to the formation of the WLB. While it exposed deep political divisions and broad lack of understanding and trust between the various women's organizations, at the same time it intensified participants' appreciation of their commonalities as women, their commitment to ethnic reconciliation and encouraged the establishment of new women's organizations.

Throughout 1999, a series of activities organized by different women's organizations brought representatives together to develop familiarity and confidence in each other. In each case the medium for discussion was women's rights, empowerment and leadership. The scheduling of Burma to report to the Committee for Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in January 2000 and the Beijing Plus Five conference in June 2000

provided opportunities for women's organizations to collaborate for the first time to produce shadow reports to present at these conferences.

A special meeting of women's organization in September 1999 resulted in several landmark decisions. First, preparations for the second Women's Organizations of Burma Conference were agreed upon. Second, the idea to form the Women's League of Burma was first raised for consideration and third, a research team comprised of representatives of five women's organizations was selected to produce the CEDAW shadow report on behalf of the women's organizations from Burma.

Building on the success of these foundational activities, the twelve participating women's' organizations at the Second Women's Organizations from Burmese Conference in December 1999 agreed to establish the Women's League of Burma.

Major Milestones 1998-2001

1998

November First Women's organizations of Burma Conference

1999

September Preparatory meeting for Second Women's Organizations of Burma Conference

December Second Women's Organizations of Burma Conference and the WLB is formed

2000

January A five member delegation representing Women's Organizations of Burma travels to the 22nd Session of the CEDAW in New York

June A WLB representative travels to New York to present the WLB report at the 44th Commission on the Status of Women

2001

January WLB First Congress held on January 22-26

February The WLB Secretariat office was opened in Chiang Mai

March WLB six-month intern program begins

WLB sent a representative to the 45th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, 6-16 March

April WLB sent a four-woman delegation to the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva Switzerland to participate in the Burma delegation

May "Women in Peace Building: South Africa's Experience" workshop was held from 21-24 May

July From July-September the WLB organized three one-week training sessions in India on "Human Rights and Empowerment for Women" Commencement of the WLB's WCAR signature campaign

August 26 August - 7 September, a six-member WLB delegation attended the WCAR and the parallel NGO forum in Durban, South Africa

December From the 4-17 December, five WLB representatives attended a "State Constitution Seminar" in Germany organized by the United League for Democracy (UNLD)

Organizational members

- All Burma Democratic Lushai Women's Organization (ABDLWO)
- Burmese Women's Union (BWU)
- Chin Women's Organization (CWO)
- Kachin Women's Association – Thailand (KWAT)
- Karen Women's Organization (KWO)
- Karenni Women's Organization (KNWO)
- Lahu Women's Organization (LWO)
- Pa-O Women's Union (PWU)
- Rakhaing Women's Union (RWU)
- Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN)
- Tavoy Women's Union (TWU)
- Women's Rights and Welfare Association of Burma (WRWAB)

Core beliefs, values, mission and purpose

As a multi-ethnic women's organization, the WLB respects that each member organization has its own history, culture, political circumstances, objectives and challenges. In joining together to promote the common interests of women from Burma and a democratic Burma, the women's organizations that constitute the WLB emphasize the following shared core beliefs, values, mission and purpose.

WLB members share three inter-dependent core beliefs.

1. Tolerance, equality and gender balance should inform the basis of all forms of relationships from the family to the state. As such, the contribution of women in the struggle for human rights and democracy is requisite
2. Political processes of all kinds must be inclusive to be successful and sustainable. Therefore, women's participation in national reconciliation and peace building processes is essential from the beginning
3. Representative democracy is the most just and fair form of governance, both as a form of government and a practice of organizations.

As the means of pursuing these core beliefs, the WLB members value the on-going development of trust, friendship, cooperation, solidarity, participation. These values are fostered not only amongst each other, but equally important, with all individuals and organizations with whom they interact.

WLB members share a strong vision for the future of Burma and its peoples. At the broadest level, they envisage a societies characterized by equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination. This vision is to be achieved through the slow and challenging processes of national reconciliation, recognition of

gender equality and the implementation of a federal democratic political system in Burma.

With these core beliefs, values and visions clearly in mind, WLB members have agreed their mission is to:

- Work for the empowerment and advancement of the status of women
- Work for the increased participation of women in all spheres of society, including in politics at the local, national and international levels
- Build mutual understanding among all nationals and participate in the national reconciliation processes at all levels
- Work for the increased participation in the democracy movement and peace and development.

As an umbrella organization, the WLB exists to act as a conduit for its member organizations, to bridge gaps between local, national, regional and global levels. As such, its primary function is to act as a type of local/global nexus; to channel information, financial support, technical knowledge, networking links, women's solidarity and other resources between multiple spatio-political levels. This purpose requires the WLB to be proactive, responsive, flexible and lateral in its approach to all activities.

At the same time, the WLB represents the collective voices of its member organizations when lobbying for political change and human rights at various local, regional and global forums. Furthermore, as members of displaced communities, they work to raise awareness of the conditions of women and their families not only in Burma, but also displaced across Burma's international borders.

Organizational structure

The WLB is structured into three tiers of management: the Congress, the Presidium Board and the Secretariat. The WLB management structure for the period of this report is as follows:

Congress:

Presidium Board:

Secretariat:

Congress

The Congress consists of two representatives from each member organization and has the highest decision making power. The term of the Congress is two years. The Congress is responsible for deciding the WLB's Platform for Action based on the WLB's priority areas. It is the responsibility of each member organization to select two representatives for the WLB Congress according to their own procedures.

Presidium Board

The Presidium Board is constituted by one representative of each member organization and has responsibility for the WLB's policy development and strategic planning. It also has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the organization's program by the Secretariat. Presidium Board meetings are held at least once every eight months.

Secretariat

The Secretariat is comprised of three representatives from different organizations elected by the Congress and is based on the Thailand-Burma border. It is the duty of the Secretariat to take full responsibility for implementing the tasks laid down by the Congress and the Presidium Board and the day-to-day running of the secretariat office. The term of the Secretariat is two years, coinciding with the term of the Congress.

Program Designing Team

A five-member program designing team is appointed by the Presidium Board from within its constituent representatives. This team consists of the three member Secretariat based on the Thailand-Burma border and two representatives from member organizations based on Burma's western borders. The two western borders' representatives are appointed the roles of 'in-charge' and 'assistant in-charge' and oversee the implementation of the WLB program on Burma's western borders.

Working groups

Working groups, comprised of organizational members appointed by the Congress, work with the Secretariat to support the Secretariat and implement the work plans of the WLB.

Constitution Drafting Committee

A special constitution drafting committee was selected when the WLB was initially formed at the Second Women's Organizations of Burma Conference in December 2000. This three woman committee was given the responsibility to draft the WLB constitution which was adopted at the First WLB Congress in January 2001.

Platform for Action

The WLB's platform for action is based on the four priority areas decided upon at the time of the formation of the WLB in 1999. They are:

- Capacity building
- Foreign relations and networking
- Peace and reconciliation
- Refugee affairs

This inaugural report covers the first stages of the WLB's formal operations. Therefore much of the activities are focused on the establishment of structures and procedures, making initial decisions and setting primary agendas. Importantly, this is a learning period for the individuals involved.

Activities for the period October 2000-December 2001

For a detailed chronology of the WLB's important activities, including milestones leading to the formation of the WLB, please see Appendix.

WLB activities can be broadly categorized into the following four categories:

- A. Establishing the structures and developing the capacity of the WLB
- B. Development of the women's movement
- C. Lobbying and network at the global and regional levels
- D. Positioning and alliance building within the broader Burmese Opposition Movement.

A. Establishing the structures and developing the capacity of the WLB

- *WLB organizing trip to India and Bangladesh, November 2000*

A small WLB delegation traveled to India and Bangladesh to meet women's organizations from Burma based on Burma's western borders. The purpose of the trip was to introduce the WLB to women's organizations, explain the WLB's intentions and to encourage their participation.

- *First WLB office opened, December 2000*

The first WLB office is opened in Chiang Mai for the initial purposes of organizing the inaugural WLB congress.

- *WLB First Congress, January 2001*

WLB held its first Congress on 22-26 January 2001. The Congress was attended by twenty-eight representatives from ten member organizations. Two member organizations were unable to attend due to security reasons. The Secretariat was elected, composed of representatives from the KWO, BWU and KWAT. The five-member program designing team was selected, composing of representatives from KWO, BWU (2), KWAT, and SWAN. The Western border initiatives, it was decided, were to be implemented by representatives from WRWAB and ABLWO. A Platform for Action was designed based on four priority areas: capacity building, foreign relations, peace and reconciliation, and refugee affairs.

Special guests were invited to address the WLB congress. On the third day of the congress, representatives of the Migrant Assistance Program (MAP) explored with the WLB Congress their responses to and priorities concerning violence against women from Burma. Patricia Sarenas of the Philippine's House of Representative addressed the Congress on the last day speaking about "Women and Peace Building".

- *Joint Presidium Board and Secretariat meeting, January 2001*

A joint Presidium Board and Secretariat meeting was held on January 27-28 to identify and prioritize the WLB's activities for the following twelve months. It was decided to:

- Conduct a series of "Training for Trainers" to build the capacity of the WLB and its constituent members

- Hold a seminar on “The Role of Women in Constitution Drafting Processes” in both Thailand and India for the purpose of increasing women’s understanding of constitutions and increase the WLB’s capacity to represent women’s concerns and desires in the Burmese democracy movement’s constitution drafting processes
- Produce a quarterly publication on the activities of the WLB as a strategy for engaging communities at a local level and also foreign relations networking
- Organize a study tour for women representatives to observe a range of democratic political systems of various countries
- Organize cultural exchange program for different ethnic groups on International Women’s Day on 8th March 2002
- Celebrate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s birthday on 19 June to promote solidarity amongst women of all ethnicities from Burma
- Produce a range of postcards, leaflets and signature campaigns as strategies to promote women’s rights at the community level in everyday life
- Produce a WLB calendar

- *WLB office opened, February 2001*

The WLB secretariat office was opened in Chiang Mai, managed by the three secretariat members, two office staff, an administrator and an accountant. This was a significant landmark in the operationalisation of the WLB’s Platform for Action.

- *The Program Design Team Meeting, February 2001*

At the first Program Design meeting held on 26 February, the WLB’s Work Plan for 2001-02, was mapped out.

- *Burma Donor’s Forum, February 2001*

Two WLB representatives traveled to Stockholm in Sweden to attend a Donors Forum organized by the Swedish NGO Foundation of Human Rights to explain the recent establishment of the WLB. This opportunity was important to explain to interested donors issues most important for women and WLB’s plans to address these issues. As a new organization, this forum was significant to gain the confidence and trust of donors to work with the WLB and its constituent members.

- *Commencement of the WLB six-month internship program, March 2001*

A representative from the RWU arrived at the WLB office to commence the WLB’s first internship program. The second intern, from the TWU, commenced her program at the WLB office in June 2001, and the third intern, from the KWAT commenced in July 2001. Components of the internship included accounting, office management, computers, English and Thai languages, civil society, women’s rights and peace workshops.

- *WLB’s General Secretary’s India visit, August-September 2001*

The WLB’s General Secretary traveled to India in with WLB and HREIB trainers to strengthen relationships between the WLB secretariat and western borders-based women’s organizations from Burma. She took this opportunity to develop

a better understanding of the socio-political environment for women displaced to the west of Burma and strengthen communications with women's organizations.

B. Development of the Women's Movement

i. Organized by the WLB for women from Burma

- "Women's Rights in Conflict Areas" workshop, HREIB, TACDB, MAP and FWB
- WLB signature campaign against racism, July-August 2001

As part of a program of activities leading to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and other Intolerances (WCAR), the WLB launched a signature campaign. WLB members traveled refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, in Thailand, India and Bangladesh and collected 51,487 signatures on a petition that was sent to the WCAR to support the inclusion of a country-specific recommendation on Burma's refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants in the Asia Pacific NGO Declaration against Racism. The objectives of the campaign were to:

- lobby and advocate on behalf of people of Burma living under military rule which persecuted ethnic nationalities at the regional and international levels
- raise awareness of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance at the grass roots level of communities from Burma
- build a greater sense of solidarity amongst people from Burma

This broad reaching and highly successful campaign was made possible with the support of many organizations and individuals to which the WLB is extremely grateful.

- "Human Rights and Empowerment for Women" trainings in India during July-September 2001.

Two training workshops for women on Burma's western borders were conducted jointly by WLB and the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma. The first training was held in Aizaw on 25-31 July and included eight Indian-based participants from the Chin Women's Organization, the Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO) and migrant women from Burma. The second training, held in Delhi between 5-11 August included 20 participants from organizations based in both India and Bangladesh. Topics covered in the training program ranged from basic human rights, understandings of sources of power – how it works and how it may be shared, and women's leadership.

A third training workshop was conducted by the HREIB on 21-25 September in Delhi. This extensive training course covered women's rights, child rights, women's leadership skills, international human rights mechanisms, international human rights law, the United Nations, non-government and government organizations, , human rights monitoring and advocacy. Eighteen participants included representatives from the KWHRO, WRWAB, CWO, CWOC, ABDLWO, FTUB-W, CWLB and women migrants.

- "Training for Trainers: Women's Rights," WLB and BRC, December 2001
- International Women's Day, March 2001

Celebrations for International Women's day were held by WLB member organizations in six locations: Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang, Mae Sod, Sangklaburi and New Delhi, India. The WLB secretariat took this opportunity to visit three of these locations to explain the importance of the WLB and International Women's Day. As a gesture of solidarity, the WLB also sent a letter of support to the women members of the Danish Burma Committee in commemoration of the 100th Women's Day in Copenhagen.

- "Women in Peace Building: South Africa's Experience", May 2001

A powerful four-day workshop led by Ms Bunie Mattanyane Sexwale of South Africa's Africa National Congress (ANC) was held between 21-24 May in Chiang Mai. Ms Sexwale is an activist and social science researcher and trainer. Thirty-two representatives from thirteen women's organizations attended the workshop on women's role in peace building, drawing on the experiences of South Africa. With many similarities existing between South Africa and Burma, the participants engaged enthusiastically in discussions which included basic techniques for building peace – starting with oneself and then one's family; how to practice peace amongst children and youth and important lessons about responsibility that all share to obtain and maintain peace.

- Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday celebrations, 19 July 2001
- Anti-racism awareness raising campaign, June-September 2001
- 10th Anniversary of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Nobel Peace Prize and the 100th Anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize

ii. *Participating in activities organized by the Burmese Opposition Movement*

WLB members participated extensively in workshops, seminars, congresses and training programs hosted by other organizations within the Burmese Opposition Movement. In this way, the WLB has worked continually to build knowledge and experience in as many areas related to Burma and advocacy as possible while also establishing its presence in the Movement. For this report period, events that WLB representatives participated in included:

- "Transition in South Africa," National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), Bangkok
- "Analyzing Burma's Electoral System" workshop held in Bangkok in June 2001, organized by the Burma Fund and held in Bangkok
- "International Lobbying" training held by the Burmese Members of Parliament Union (MPU) in Bangkok on 13-14 June 2001.
- "Strengthening Civil Society" workshop held by Friends Without Borders (FWB) in 24-28 June 2001
- "Conflict Resolution" seminar held by the Students and Youth Council of Burma (SYCB) between 10-14 August 2001
- "Human Rights" training held by the All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU) on 27-29 September 2001
- "Office Management" workshop held by the National Health and Education Council (NHEC) in November 2001

Participating in regional training workshops and seminars

- “Young Women in Politics” Training
WLB representatives participated in a Young Women in Politics training held in Bangkok in November 2000.
- “Women’s Human Rights Advocacy” training, Cambodia, March 2001
A WLB representative participated in training on “Women’s Rights and Advocacy” held jointly by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women – Asia Pacific (CATW-AP) and the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC).
- “Citizenship and Good Governance” workshop, Gender and Development Research Institute, Bangkok, September 2001
- “Media Communication Skills”, Scaca-Komas, Malaysia, September 2001

Participation in international events

- “Empowerment Education Summer Camp” in Ukraine, August 2001
- “Federalism: a German-Burmese Dialogue Conference”, Germany, December 2001.

C. Lobbying and networking at the global and regional levels

United Nations

- CEDAW 22nd Session, New York, January 2000

Five delegates each representing their organization traveled to the United Nations 22nd CEDAW session to present a shadow report to the CEDAW committee. These representatives were members of the eleven-member team who researched and wrote the shadow report. This was the first time Burma came before the CEDAW committee and the first time a women’s delegation from the Burmese Opposition Movement represented themselves at the UN level.

The focus of the shadow report was to raise the serious human rights concerns awareness of women in and from conflict areas in Burma because the military junta specifically denied on-going conflict especially in some ethnic areas. In relation to women from conflict areas, the Shadow report focussed on four main areas: Health, Education, Violence against Women and Poverty.

- Beijing Plus Five, Commission on the Status of Women, New York, June 2000
- 45th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, March 2001.

Through the sponsorship and coordination of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) Women’s Affairs Department, a WLB representative was present at the 45th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York on 6-16 March. As part of her lobbying program, she

gave two presentations; one arranged by the NCGUB's Burma UN Service office and the other by Amnesty International.

- 57th Session of the UNCHR, Geneva, March-April, 2001

A four-member WLB delegation attended the 57th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva between 27 March and 20 April as part of the Burma delegation arranged by the NCGUB. For the first time, women delegates outnumbered men delegates.

- A consultant for UNHCR Woman's Affairs section meets with WLB in Thailand.
- Asia Pacific Preparatory NGO Networking Meeting for the WCAR, April 2001

Leading up to the WCAR was a series of regional NGO meetings where NGO representatives combined analysis and resources to identify key themes concerning each region. The Asia Pacific NGO networking meeting for the WCAR was held in Katmandu, Nepal on 27-29 April. Two WLB representatives were amongst the 180 regional and national NGOs and grassroots activists from the Asia Pacific region. The WLB participants attended the "Refugees and Racism" workshop. From this regional meeting, WLB representatives commenced the signature campaign calling for a country-specific recommendation to be included in the NFO Declaration on Racism concerning Burma's refugees, internally displaced and migrants.

- World Conference against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances, (WCAR) August-September 2001

The WLB sent a six-member delegation to Durban, South Africa to attend the WCAR conference and the parallel NGO Forum. Another two WLB delegates based in India and Bangladesh were scheduled to attend, however, due to visa and communication complications they were unable to reach Durban.

The preparations and campaigns embarked upon around the WCAR were to date, the largest and most significant of projects WLB had undertaken. They included travelling around Burma's border areas in three countries, education campaigns, extensive consultations and discussions, the preparation of numerous speeches and presentations and the development of educational materials both for local communities and the international forum. As such, the WCAR was the vehicle for a significant stage in the growth and development of the WLB as an organization and for their community development and political programs.

At the WCAR in Durban, the WLB delegates engaged in a wide variety of activities:

The Forums:

The NGO Forum was held on 28 August to 1 September and was attended by all six delegates. For activities, see below.

The Government Forum was attended by two WLB delegates from 31 August to 7 September and several workshops were attended. A WLB delegate also attended the daily gender caucuses. They also attended the Plenary sessions and sessions on the Program of Action and Draft Declaration. On the 6th September, a WLB representative gave an intervention at the Plenary session calling on the WCAR to address the consequences of racial discrimination and related human rights violations committed by the SPDC in Burma.

The Youth Summit was attended by one WLB delegate WCAR from 26-7 August.

The NGO Declaration: The WLB delegates lobbied various caucuses, in particular those concerning the Asia Pacific region, gender and migration for the inclusion of Burma as a country-specific clause in the NGO Declaration. The WLB lobbied for the WCAR to address the consequences of racial discrimination and related human rights violations committed by the SPDC.

The WLB Information Booth: The delegates held a WLB exhibition booth which showed the videos "No mercy, No Peace" on the plight of internally displaced people in Burma and "The Dispossessed" on forced relocation in Shan State. Publications, handouts and brochures were also available.

The Petition: On 27 August, the petition signed by 51,487 internally displaced, refugees and migrants from Burma was submitted to the Rapporteur of the Commission on Internally Displaced Persons, Refugees and Migrants, and the NGO declaration drafting committee for the inclusion of Burma as a country specific clauses in the NGO Declaration. On the 7th September, the petition was presented by the WLB delegation to the UNHR Commissioner, Mary Robinson and was officially accepted in full.

WLB Presentations: On the 29th August, WLB delegates gave a presentation in the multiple forms of discrimination facing ethnic women in Burma at a panel sponsored by the Asia Pacific Women's Law and Development Forum (APWLD), Isis International - Manila and INFORM titled: "Intersectionality: Re-thinking the Race/Gender/Class Divide". That same evening, a WLB delegate spoke of the impact of militarization in Burma at the "Refugee Roundtable Discussion" organized by the Asian Women's Human Rights Council - Australia. On 31st August, the WLB organized a panel at the Asia-Pacific tent on "Circles of Displacement: Reality for Women under Burma's Military" at which three WLB delegates spoke. Their presentations covered ethno-politics and militarization in Burma; the situation of refugee women and Migrant women.

Press coverage: On the 5th September, a WLB representative spoke at the Asia-Pacific Caucus press conference. On the 6th September, the intervention presented by the WLB representative at the Government Forum Plenary Session was reported in length in Thailand's English Language newspapers, *The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post*, and also in the South African newspaper, *The Star*. Throughout the entire conference, WLB representatives were regularly interviewed by various newsgroups including the BBC World Service, the Burmese Service of Radio-Free Asia and Voice of America.

Regional

- Women's International War Crimes Tribunal, Tokyo, Japan, December 2000

A WLB representative traveled to Tokyo to present the testimony of Naw Dha Mu, a Karen woman, to the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal. Naw Dha Mu's testimonial helped bring international attention to the widespread use of rape as a war-weapon by the SPDC, particularly against ethnic minority women in conflict areas in Burma. Through her courage, WLB representatives had the opportunity to join in solidarity with women around the world whose communities experienced similar gendered war crimes, now and during other times in recent history.

- "Asean People's Workshop", Forum-Asia and Altsean-Burma, Jakarta, Indonesia, November 2001.
- "World Conference on Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders", Sathira-Dhammasatham, Bangkok November, 2001.
- "Towards More Effective Protection of Human Rights Defenders", Bangkok, 30 November -1 December.
- 100th Anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize, "Women of Burma", FFPC, Bangkok, 8 December 2001
- Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday, "Women for Peace, Peace for Change", Chiang Mai University public speaking forum, 19 June 2001.
- WLB guest seminar presentation, "Women's Participation in Burma's Politics," Women's Study Centre, Chiang Mai University

D. Positioning and alliance building within the broader Burmese Opposition Movement

Having become established by women's organizations as a representative voice for women's organizations within the Burmese Opposition Movement, the WLB immediately began to establish itself with other major organizations and enacting its representative role by participating in policy and strategy development processes within the movement.

This process commenced at the WLB's First Congress in January 2001 when local NGOs and Burma groups were invited to meet the newly elected working body of the WLB. Shortly afterwards, WLB representatives met with locally based NGOs service providers and human rights groups to discuss better cooperation and coordination.

Policy and strategy forums in which the WLB participated included:

- Altsean Burma's "International Strategy Meeting," March 2001
- NHEC Education Seminars, NHEC, April - November 2001
- National Reconciliation Program (NRP) consultation meetings, 2001

Brief analysis of activities for this report period

The three primary areas of activity that the WLB has engaged in are empowerment of women from Burma and their communities, pro-active participation in political processes and developing structures of a Burmese Women's Movement.

Empowerment of women and their communities: This has taken many forms and covered a wide array of topics and issues relevant to people from Burma, refugees and forced migration. Of particular focus in this report period was:

- *Women's Leadership*, for example, 'Training of Trainers' programs
- *Skills training* including lobbying, research and documentation and office management
- *Education* in human rights, politics and gender, with particular focus on peace and reconciliation, women's rights, racism, violence against women, refugee rights and constitutions

Representation in Political Process: This covers almost all areas of women's lives as the WLB understands politics as processes of power constituted from the level of the personal to the international. Within conventional political processes ongoing within the broader Burmese Opposition Movement, the WLB has taken a leading role in introducing women's perspectives and agendas on issues including political transition, political democratic systems, civil society, citizenship, good governance, women in politics.

Structural Development of the Burmese Women's Movement: Integral to this formative stage of the WLB's operation, are processes that lay foundations for and build the structures of a broader women's movement of Burma. WLB activities, which contribute most significantly to the structuring of this women's movement, include:

- Developing the diapsoric connections between women's organizations located on various borders, e.g. between the Western, Eastern and northern borders of Burma
- Developing a women's political agenda, in particular, peace and peace building, national reconciliation, transition and development, women's empowerment
- Documenting the emerging perspectives and policies of the WLB and its member organizations through report writing, speeches, articles, interventions. Thus accumulating records of women's voices and perspectives set within a human rights framework
- Establishing and positioning the WLB within broader networks with local, regional and global women's movements and human rights movements

The WLB has adopted various methodological approaches to pursue their core activities and purposes:

- Learning from others who have experienced or are experiencing similar challenges of political struggle, development and women's empowerment, for example, the women's experiences in South Africa

- Training and giving significant experience to young women as the future of the women's movement and women's representation in political processes
- Raising the role of gender in the Burmese Opposition movement through the introduction of new agendas. These new agendas addressed in this reporting period include, peace and peace building, anti-racism, women's political participation and the rights of stateless and forcibly displaced people.

Importantly, the introduction of new agenda issues to the Burmese Opposition Movement has opened spaces for potential new debates within the movement in two ways. First, by making public the impact of rape as a weapon of war used by the SPDC on women in Burma, particularly ethnic minority women, the WLB is breaking a culture of silence that pervades on the gendered character of abuses suffered under military rule.

Second, many factors upon which women's subordination and rights violations are based rest upon arguments of cultural relativism pre-dominantly held within the Burmese Opposition movement, who, at the same time, appeal to universal notions of human rights. In raising women's rights issues that challenge fixed notions of culture, the WLB is also encouraging debate within the opposition movement around universalistic and relativist notions of culture that underlie broader arguments for political transformation and democratic rule.

Summary of WLB's accomplishments and challenges

Accomplishments

- WLB Constitution
- CEDAW shadow report
- Beijing +5 report
- WCAR Campaign
- The increasing breadth and complexity of WLB campaigns
- Growth and intensification of networks regionally, globally, and locally

Significant challenges faced by the WLB

- Security during travel
- Unbalanced representation of member organizations at regional and international forum
- Specific constraints on representatives from the Western border to join international and regional delegations, and participate in activities based in Thailand
- Limited resources directed to and accessed by the Western border

Recommendation for further evaluation of the WLB

While the WLB has grown and developed rapidly, and continues to do so, a significant measure of the umbrella organization's success is found in the impact that their activities are having for member organizations. Most specifically, if the member organizations are growing and developing as a result of access to the better resources made available by the WLB. ■

Appendix Chronology of WLB's Activities, December 1999 to December 2001.

Colour Key

- Organizational activities
- Trainings attended
- International Lobbying/networking
- Regional lobbying/networking
- Local lobbying/networking
- Promoting women's empowerment and the women's movement amongst women from Burma
- WLB's participation in Opposition political processes

Important events Prior to Report Period

- 1998 November: First Women's organizations of Burma Conference
- 1999 September: Preparatory meeting for Second Women's Organizations of Burma Conference is held and a CEDAW Shadow Report writing committee is selected including one member from each of the nine organizations present at the meeting.
- October: Research and preparations begin to produce the CEDAW Shadow Report
- December: Second Women's Organizations of Burma Conference and the WLB is formed.

YEAR 2000

January

- A five-member delegation representing Women's Organizations of Burma travels to the 22nd Session of the CEDAW in New York.

February

- Research and preparation on the WLB's Beijing Plus Five report commences

June

- A WLB representative travels to New York to present the WLB report at the 44th Commission on the Status of Women.

October

- NCUB initiating workshop on "Transition in South Africa" in Bangkok attended by 3 WLB representatives

November

- Organizational meeting of the WLB steering committee, working committees and constitution drafting committee held to prepare for the First Congress of the WLB.

- "Young Women in Politics" workshop in Bangkok was attended by a WLB representative.
- WLB representatives in Bangladesh and India took organizing trips to the Western border areas to meet with women and introduce and explain about the WLB.

December

- WLB sent a representative to the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo, Japan to present the testimony of Naw Dha Mu, a 40 year old Karen woman.
- Preparations underway to open the office of the WLB Secretariat in Chiang Mai

YEAR 2001

January

- WLB First Congress held on January 22-26. The Congress was attended by twenty-eight representatives from ten member organizations. Two member organizations were unable to attend due to security reasons.
 - The Secretariat was elected, composed of representatives from the KWO, BWU and KWAT.
 - The five member program designing team was selected, composed of representatives from KWO, BWU (2), KWAT, and SWAN
 - The Western border initiatives to be implemented by representatives from WRWAB and ABLWO.
 - Platform for Action written based on 4 priority areas: Capacity Building, foreign relations, peace and reconciliation, and refugee affairs.
- At the WLB first conference, an idea sharing workshop on VAW was held with representatives of the Migrant Assistant Program (MAP)
- On the final day of the conference, the Congress was addressed by Patricia Sarenas from the Philippine House of Representative. Sarenas spoke on issues of "Women and Peace Building".
- Meeting of the Presidium board and the Secretariat to decide on the WLB activities for 2001. Priorities included:
 - Conduct a series of "Training for Trainers" (capacity building)
 - Hold a Seminar on "The Role of Women in Constitution Drafting Processes in both Thailand and India (capacity building)
 - Produce a quarterly publication on the activities of the WLB (local development and foreign relations networking)
 - Organize a study tour for women representatives to observe international mechanisms (capacity building)
 - Organize cultural exchange program for different ethnic groups on International Women's Day on 8th March 2002.
 - Promote Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday on 19 June, producing solidarity postcards, leaflets and signature campaign (promoting women's rights)
 - Produce a WLB calendar (promote women's rights)

February

- The WLB Secretariat office was opened in Chiang Mai. In addition to the Secretariat, the office is staffed by one administrator and one accountant from WLB member organizations.
- WLB sent two representatives to the "Burma Donors Forum" in Stockholm Sweden, organized by the Swedish NGO Foundation for Human Rights.

March

- International Women's Day was commemorated on 8 March in collaboration with member organizations in six locations: Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang, Mae Sod, Sangklaburi and New Dehli. The Secretariat traveled to three regions on IWD to explain about the WLB and the purpose of IWD.
- To show solidarity with the, WLB sent the women members of the Danish Burma Committee a letter to demonstrate solidarity in their celebration of the 100th Women's Day in Copenhagen.
- WLB six-month intern program begins with the arrival of a RWU representative at the Secretariat office. The internship is sponsored by OSI.
- WLB sent a representative to the 45th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, 6-16 March. The trip was organized and sponsored by the NCGUB Women's Affairs Department. Two presentations were given while in New York as part of attending the CSW conference; first at the NCGUB's Burma UN Service Office and second at Amnesty International.
- Two WLB representatives participated in the Altsean-Burma "International Strategy Meeting" in Bangkok, 17-19 March to discuss the commencement of dialogue between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and SDPC, and the opposition movement's response to this political development.
- A WLB representative participated in the "Women's Human Rights Advocacy" training in Cambodia, organized by the Coalition against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP) and the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC).
- WLB sent a four-person delegation to the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva Switzerland to participate in the Burma delegation. The conference was from 27 March-20 April. The Burma delegation was organized by the NCGUB. For the first time, women representatives outnumbered men representatives in a Burma delegation.

April

- Preparations for the "Women in Peace Building: South Africa's Experience" workshop
- Assisting NHEC in preparing and holding a seminar on education. WLB representatives also provided translation during the seminar.
- Two WLB Representatives attended the Asia Pacific NGO Networking Meeting for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and other related intolerances (WCAR) in Katmandu, Nepal on 27-29 April. The regional meeting was designed to deepen participants' analysis and understanding of key themes and issues identified in the region concerning racism.

- The WLB representatives participated in the Refugees and Racism workshop
- The WLB representatives also lobbied for "A Country Specific Recommendation on Burma"

May

- "Women in Peace Building: South Africa's Experience" workshop was held from 21-24 May in Chiang Mai. The workshop was facilitated by Ms Bunie Mattanyane Sexwale, a social science researcher, trainer and activist from South Africa and member of the African Congress of South Africa. The workshop was attended by 32 representatives from 13 women's organizations – both member and non member groups.
- "Women's rights in Conflict Areas" workshop was attended by the WLB intern on 27-30 May. The workshop was organized by HREIB, TACDB, MAP and FWB
- NRP consultation meeting was attended by a WLB representative on 26-18 May
- Program Designing group met to outline the work plan for 2001-2002
- With the cooperation of the NRP, the WLB held a meeting with locally based NGOs to discuss strategies for better coordination and cooperation.
- Consultation meeting with NRP and NED
- Second Presidium Board meeting

June

- Preparations for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday commemoration
- Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 56th birthday was celebrated on 19th June in five locations in the Burma-Thailand borderlands by both member and non-member organizations. Celebrations included merit making ceremonies at Buddhist monasteries and prayer gatherings at Christian churches.
- As part of the program to honour Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday, a WLB representative participated in public speaking forum at Chiang Mai University organized by MAP. The theme of the forum was "Women for Peace; Peace for Change."
- Two WLB representatives attended a workshop on 13-14 June in Bangkok, organized by the Burma Fund, analyzing electoral systems in Burma.
- The Members of Parliament Union (MPU) organized a workshop on "International Lobbying Training," in Bangkok by four WLB representatives.
- A "Strengthening Civil Society" workshop, organized by FWB, was attended by two WLB representatives on 24-28 June.
- A WLB/SWAN representative gave a guest seminar on "Women's Participation in Burma's Politics" to a post-graduate course at the Women's Study Centre, Chiang Mai University.
- Preparatory meeting for WLB's campaign at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and other intolerances. (WCAR)
- WLB held a meeting with the consultant for UNHCR's women's affairs section.
- WLB's Secretariat and Program Design group meet with NED to discuss 2001-2002 proposal

- WLB conducts a needs assessment survey with member organizations to plan future activities.
- WLB intern from TWU commences her six-month internship

July

- From July-September the WLB organized three 1 week trainings in India on "Human Rights and Empowerment for Women." the trainings were conducted by WLB and HREIB. The trainings were attended by women activists in Bangladesh as well as India. Many women's organizations attended the trainings, including the Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO), WRWAB, CWO, BWU, ABDLWO, RWU, FTUB-W, CWLB and some individual migrant workers.
- A WLB Secretariat member goes to India and Bangladesh to network with women's organizations on the Western border, so as to strengthen communication channels and deepen understanding of the situations experienced between the two border areas.
- Commencement of the WLB's WCAR Signature Campaign. This is one dimension of a multi-layered campaign to combine a lobbying campaign at the UN Anti-racism conference at the international/global level with human rights education, community empowerment and solidarity and the development of the women's movement at the grassroots levels. The Signature Campaign was organized by WLB representatives in conjunction with local groups and individuals in refugee camps, IDP areas and in migrant communities along Burma's borders with Thailand and India to get support for the WLB's "Country Specific Situation and Recommendation on Burma" to be included in the WCAR outcome. The petition was translated into eleven ethnic languages. In total, 51, 487 signatures were collected.
- WLB intern from KWAT commenced her six-month internship.

August

- WLB hosts a Women's Exchange meeting in Chiang Mai
- Between 1-9 August, a WLB representative attended a "Empowerment Education Summer Camp" in Ukraine
- The WLB interns attended the SYCB seminar, "Conflict Resolution" on 10-14 August
- A WLB representative participated in the NHEC education meeting, "Developing a new Curriculum and Teaching of Ethnic languages." WLB also participated in the preparation of this meeting.
- 26 August – 7 September, a six-member WLB delegation attended the WCAR and the parallel NGO forum in Durban, South Africa.
 - WLB delegate attended the Youth Summit at the WCAR on 26-27 August.
 - On 27 August, the WLB petition was submitted to the Rapporteur of the Commission on Internally Displaced Persons, Migrants and Refugees and the NGO Drafting Committee for the inclusion of Burma as country specific in the NGO Declaration
 - On 29th August, a WLB representative participated on a panel called, "Intersectionality: Rethinking the Race/Gender/Class Divide". Her presentation focused on the multiple forms of

discrimination faced by ethnic women of Burma. The panel was sponsored by APWLD, ISIS International – Manila and INFORM in the Asia Pacific tent.

- Also on 29th August, a WLB representative spoke on the impact of militarism in Burma at a “Refugee Round Table Discussion” organized by the Asian Women’s Human Rights Council – Australia.
- The WLB organized a Burma Panel in the Asia Pacific Tent entitled, “Circles of Displacement: the Reality for Women under Burma’s Military.” The panel was chaired by ISIS and three WLB delegates presented papers.
- Between 31 August – 7 September, WLB representatives attended several workshops and meetings including: The Asia Pacific Caucus Workshop “Beyond Durban”; the daily Gender Caucus; Plenary Session, Sessions on the Platform for Action and sessions of the Drafting of the Declaration.
- On 5th September, a WLB delegate spoke at the Asia Pacific Caucus press Conference
- On 6th September, a WLB delegate gave an intervention at the Plenary Session, calling on the WCAR to address the consequences of racial discrimination and related human rights violations committed by the ruling authority of Burma.
- Throughout the WCAR NGO and Government Forums, WLB delegates gave several interviews to BBC World Service, Voice of America, the Burma program of Radio Free Asia
- WLB delegates presented their petition to UN Human Rights Commissioner’s office at Durban.

September

- A WLB representative attends a “Citizenship and Good Governance” workshop organized by the Gender and Development Research Institute (Japan Foundation) in Bangkok on 20-25 September
- A WLB representative attended a “Media Communications Skills” workshop organized by Scaca Komang in Malaysia on 26-29 September.
- A WLB representative attends a “Human Rights” training held by the All Kachin, Student and Youth Union on 27-29 September.

October

- On 7-9 October, the second WLB Presidium Board meeting was held. Important considerations included:
 - The Status of current members and new member applications
 - WLB’s participation in NCUB
 - IWD 2002
 - Organizing a month long “Trainer for Trainers” course

November

- On 1-2 November, several WLB members from the WLB’s Secretariat, Presidium Board and working groups attended a Strategic Planning Workshop organized by the Danish Burma Committee for DBC funded organizations in the Burmese Opposition Movement.

- A meeting with locally based service providers (agencies that offer education, training and resources other than funding) was arranged by the NRP and attended by 2 WLB representatives. Discussions focused on how all organizations could better coordinate their training programs so as not to overlap but build on each other's work.
- A NHEC meeting to develop a new Curriculum and Teaching Methods was attended by a WLB representatives on 12-14 November. Additionally, three WLB staff members assisted in organizing the meeting.
- On 12-13 November, a WLB representative attended the "Asean People's Workshop" arranged by Forum-Asia and Altsean Burma in Jakarta, Indonesia.
- A WLB representative attended the "World Conference of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders, organized by Sathira-Dhammasatham, Bangkok on 13-14 November.
- A WLB intern attended the NHEC "Office Management" Workshop on 27-31 November.
- A conference on "Towards More Effective Protection of Human Rights Defenders" was attended by a WLB representative on 30 November – 1 December in Bangkok.

December

- From the 4-17 December, five WLB representatives attended a "State Constitution Seminar" in Germany organized by the United League for Democracy (UNLD). Other participants included representatives from groups drafting state constitutions, including Shan, Kachin, Karen, Mon, Karenni, Arakine states and representatives from the NCUB Draft Constitution Committee.
- December 8 was the 10th Anniversary of the Awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Daw Aung San Suu kyi and the 100th Anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize itself. The WLB participated in this international event by coordinating ceremonies in six border locations in Thailand, India and Bangladesh. Bags with Suu Kyi's image in them, postcards and a statement were produced by WLB for the occasion and distributed amongst migrant workers from Burma in these areas. Especially printed handkerchiefs and a campaign letter were distributed to Burmese people in Shaweli, China.
- A WLB representative gave a presentation at a regional forum held to mark the occasion of the Nobel Peace Prize anniversary the Foreign Press Club in Bangkok. Her presentation was called "Women of Burma" and discussed the role of women's organizations inside Burma under military rule and in the exiled democratic opposition movement.
- With the support of the BRC, the WLB held a "training for Trainers: Women's Rights" on 12-16 December, and was attended by participants from SWAN, KWO, MWO and BWU.
- On 19 December, the Acting Presidium Board held a special meeting to discuss a forthcoming one-month training program on peace building, to select participants to attend the MPU's Electoral System fact-finding mission in Sweden, the next WLB report and delegation to the CSW 2002.



Acronyms

ABDLWO	All Burma Democratic Lushai Women's Organization
ADHOC	Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association
AKSYU	All Kachin Students and Youth Union
ANC	African National Congress
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRC	Burma Relief Centre
BWU	Burmese Women's Union
CATW-AP	Coalition against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CWO	Chin Women's Organization
DBC	Danish Burma Committee
FTUB-W	Federated Trade Union of Burma – Women's Section
FWB	Friends Without Borders
HREIB	Human Rights and Education Institute of Burma
INGO	International non-government organizations
IWD	International Women's Day
KNWO	Karenni Women's Organization
KWAT	Kachin Women's Association – Thailand
KWHRO	Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization
KWO	Karen Women's Organization
LWO	Lahu Women's Organization
MAP	Migrant Assistance Programme
MPU	Members of Parliament Union
MWO	Mon Women's Organization
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NCUB	National Council of the Union of Burma
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGO	Non-government organizations
NHEC	National Health and Education Council
NLD	National League for Democracy
NRP	National Reconciliation Program
OSI	Open Society Institute
PWU	Pa-O Women's Union
RWU	Rakhaing Women's Union
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SWAN	Shan Women's Action Network
SYCB	Students and Youth Council of Burma
TACDB	Thai Action Committee for democracy in Burma
TWU	Tavoy Women's Union
UN	United Nations
UNCHR	United Nations Commission for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNLD	United National League for Democracy
VAW	Violence against Women
WCAR	World Conference against Racism, Xenophobia and other related intolerances
WLB	Women's League of Burma
WRWAB	Women's Rights and Welfare Association of Burma