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Ongoing state violence against women renders SPDC National Convention meaningless

The SPDC army has been using sexual violence and other forms of violence as a weapon of war against ethnic women until today. The fact that the perpetrators continue to go unpunished proves that the SPDC has taken no serious measures to eliminate violence against women.

Even during the ongoing cease-fire talks between the Karen National Union and the SPDC, women in Karen State have been raped by SPDC soldiers. These cases have been documented in detail in the new report, "Shattering Silences" released by the Karen Women's Organization on April 2nd, 2004.

Instead of taking serious measures to stop the military rape of ethnic women, the SPDC has continued to insist to the international community that the rape reports are "false." On April 5, 2004, the SPDC representative made a statement at the 60th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, rejecting again the contents of "Licence to Rape", jointly released by the Shan Women's Action Network and the Shan Human Rights Foundation in June 2002.

Yet, despite the denials, evidence of state violence against women in Burma continues to mount. A new report, "Women's Political Prisoners in Burma", jointly produced by the Burmese Women's Union and the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), exposes how women directly or indirectly involved in the human rights and democracy movement have been unjustly imprisoned and tortured by the SPDC authorities for their political belief.

According to the report, out of the 1,500 political prisoners because of their connections to democracy movements in Burma, over one hundred, including Aung San Suu Kyi, are women. These political prisoners are facing gender-based violence in the prisons.

Without releasing all political prisoners, and without taking serious measures to eliminate violence against women in Burma, the announcement made by the SPDC to reconvene the National Convention on May 17, 2004, the first step of its "roadmap," is absolutely meaningless.

WLB believes that women in Burma will not be safe unless genuine democracy is restored and basic human rights are protected.

Therefore, WLB demands that the SPDC immediately implement a nationwide ceasefire, withdraw their troops stationed in the ethnic states, immediately release Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, and begin tripartite dialogue towards national reconciliation in Burma.

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"Women's Political Prisoners in Burma" can be viewed at: (www.aappb.net) and
"Shattering Silences" at: (www.womenofburma.org)