



Department of Women and Child Interim Executive Council of Karenni State

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A Report on the Situation of Women, Children and the Elderly in Karenni State

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Introduction

Since the attempted February 2021 coup, women and children in Karenni State have suffered severely due to ongoing violence. For the last three years, the junta has deployed heavy artillery and shelling while conducting airstrikes across the state. Many school-aged children lack access to education, while pregnant women and nursing mothers face inadequate healthcare, leading to a shortage of mental health services. Women's fundamental rights, including the right to life and safety, are also under constant threat. Their security is further jeopardized by patriarchal domination, which, like war, is enforced by systemic cultural traditions and practices that discriminate against women.

The ongoing conflict has deprived children of their right to education. Children have the right to enjoy a safe environment that promotes their well-being. However, their growth and development have been hindered by the ongoing attacks by the military junta. Access to education is limited, particularly in refugee camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), where basic needs are also lacking. Further, proper nutrition and psychological support services are urgently needed.

There is an increased need for nutritious food for displaced and conflict-affected communities, as well as healthcare for people living with disabilities and the elderly population. This encompasses individuals who have sustained severe injuries, including those who lost limbs as a result of the war. Individuals with congenital disabilities need sufficient emotional and physical support, which is currently lacking.

Moreover, inadequately resourced law and order systems have resulted in persistent domestic violence and sexual exploitation of women. Many young women endure long

working hours without breaks, often in dangerous environments, and do not receive just compensation. Additionally, a significant number are pressured into the entertainment industry, where they experience severe violations of human rights, including sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The Women and Child Department of the Karenni Interim Executive Council is working diligently to address these challenges by supporting as many people as possible. However, our efforts are limited due to a lack of financial resources.

Therefore, we call on all stakeholders to create more effective plans and deliver immediate public support services for women, children, and other at-risk groups. This report seeks to inform the public, civil society organizations, donors, funders, and international bodies about the human rights situation and challenges in Karenni State.

Impacts of the Conflict on Women and Children

The continued use of airstrikes by the State Administration Council (SAC) in Karenni State has resulted in the loss of countless civilian lives. Following an escalation of attacks in May 2021, Karenni State has suffered from widespread instability as the junta destroys the properties of civilians daily, as well as schools, hospitals, clinics, and churches.

According to statistics collected by the Karenni Interim Executive Council (IEC) between 2021 and 2024, at least 253 innocent civilians have been killed, and 335 were injured in October alone as a result of war crimes committed by the military junta. In 2024, 25 women were wounded and 20 killed, while 44 children were hurt and 15 lost their lives.

Challenges for Children Living in the Refugee Camps

Since the military coup, clashes between the State Administration Council (SAC) and the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) have caused widespread displacement in Karenni State. As of October 2024, the needs of IDPs living in more than 400 refugee camps have increased, with approximately 35,000 displaced households requiring humanitarian assistance.

This situation is exacerbated by the concerning increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs), which has now surpassed 120,000. This figure is particularly notable when considering that the total population of Karenni State is about 300,000. As shown in the table

below, over 10,000 children under five and more than 30,000 children under 18 are in urgent need of education, healthcare, nutrition, and psychological support services to address the trauma they have experienced.

Children who have spent three years in refugee camps are experiencing seasonal skin disorders and measles. To support the growth and development of children under five, over 250 preschools have been set up by organizations and the community in certain state regions, serving over 2,000 students.

However, out of the more than 10,000 children under five in the area, only approximately 2,000 are enrolled in preschool, highlighting a significant access gap. The education department collaborates with various civil society organizations to establish early childhood care initiatives. However, there remains a critical demand for technical assistance, specialized knowledge, and the creation of safety and nutritional standards. Moreover, specialists are needed immediately to support the implementation of these programs.

Implementing measures for the extracurricular education of children under 18 is essential to supporting and upholding their rights to education, life, and development. Special program support is needed, such as vocational education, early childhood care, comprehensive development measures, and child protection initiatives.

Table(1): Number of children under age 18 in the camp

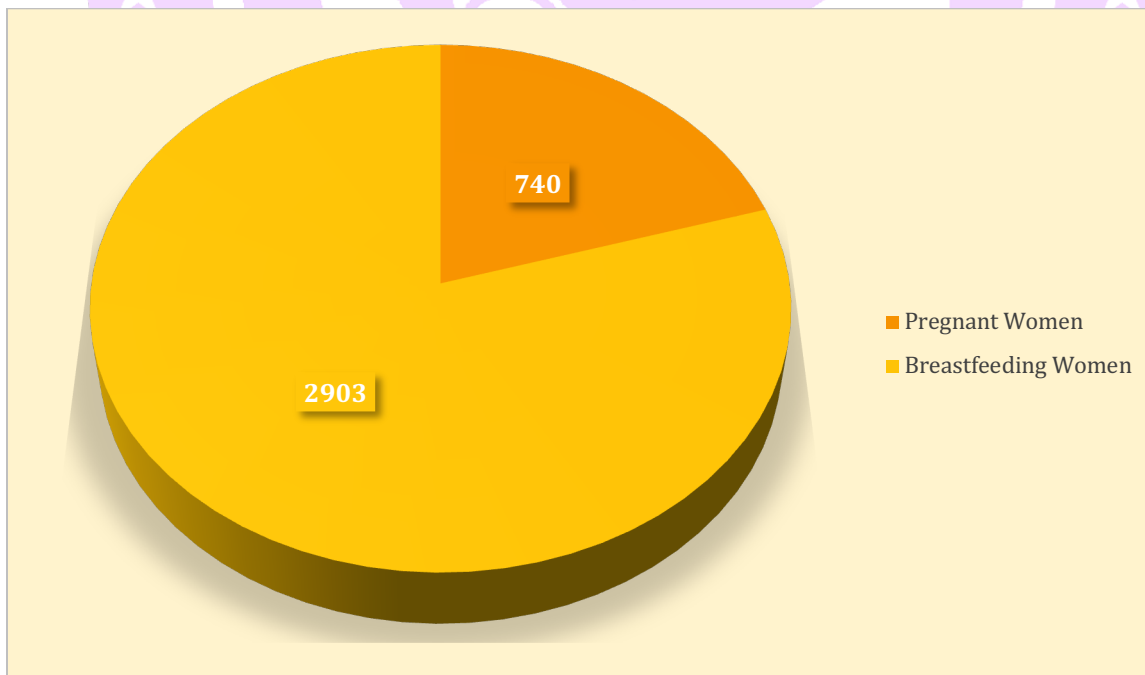
| Number of people in the camp under the age of 18 | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Under 2 | 1,536 | 1,367 | 2,903 |
| Between age 2 and 5 | 3,538 | 3,354 | 6,892 |
| Up to 5 to 18 | 15,540 | 14,837 | 30,377 |
| Total | 20,614 | 19,558 | 40,172 |

Challenges for Pregnant Women and New Mothers

As of October 1, 2024, 740 pregnant women were living in the refugee camps in Karenni State. According to Department of Health statistics, the total number of pregnant women in the entire state is around (3000). As the conflict worsens, pregnant women face significant challenges in accessing nutritional supplements and regular healthcare. They cannot afford travel expenses, face difficulties giving birth safely due to security and transportation issues, and have limited access to postnatal care. Additionally, their access to nutritious food is mainly out of reach due to inflated costs.

The camps host 62,115 women, about 3,000 of whom are lactating mothers. It is critical to allocate resources for planning and implementing protective measures for mothers and their children. For example, healthcare plans are vital for pregnant women before delivery, along with emergency cash assistance or nutritious food and postnatal care for mothers and their children.

Table 2: The number of breastfeeding women and pregnant women in the camp



In addition, approximately 20,000 women of childbearing age are included in the total number of women in the camps, which is also about (25000 -30000) of women across the entire state.

In the past three and a half years, many students have chosen not to attend regime-operated schools, hindering their ability to pursue education. Some students have entered into early marriages due to their interrupted schooling. Additionally, young women face significant challenges, such as a lack of knowledge about reproductive health and insufficient access to personal hygiene products within their communities. Their limited financial resources prevent them from buying necessary items, resulting in personal and reproductive health problems. Supplying hygiene products to adolescent girls and women is essential while increasing awareness about reproductive health.

Furthermore, young women and working-aged women face limited income-generation opportunities, especially those living in refugee camps, where employment options are scarce. Some women attempt to run small or individual businesses but need help with transportation and security issues or lack capital, which prevents business expansion. Programs or projects are required to help these women run and grow their small businesses or work as individual entrepreneurs.

Challenges for Those Living with Disabilities and the Elderly

According to the department's observations, approximately 1,200 people with disabilities live in the camps, including individuals with visual, hearing, intellectual, and physical disabilities. As indicated in the table below, there are about 900 people with disabilities, including those born with disabilities and those who lost limbs due to heavy weapons or airstrikes.

Rehabilitation programs and mental health support are urgently needed for persons with disabilities. Among those displaced by the war, at least 7,000 in the refugee camps are between the ages of 60 to 80 years old or above. This highlights the importance of specific plans for the elderly, focusing on nutrition, healthcare, and social programs.

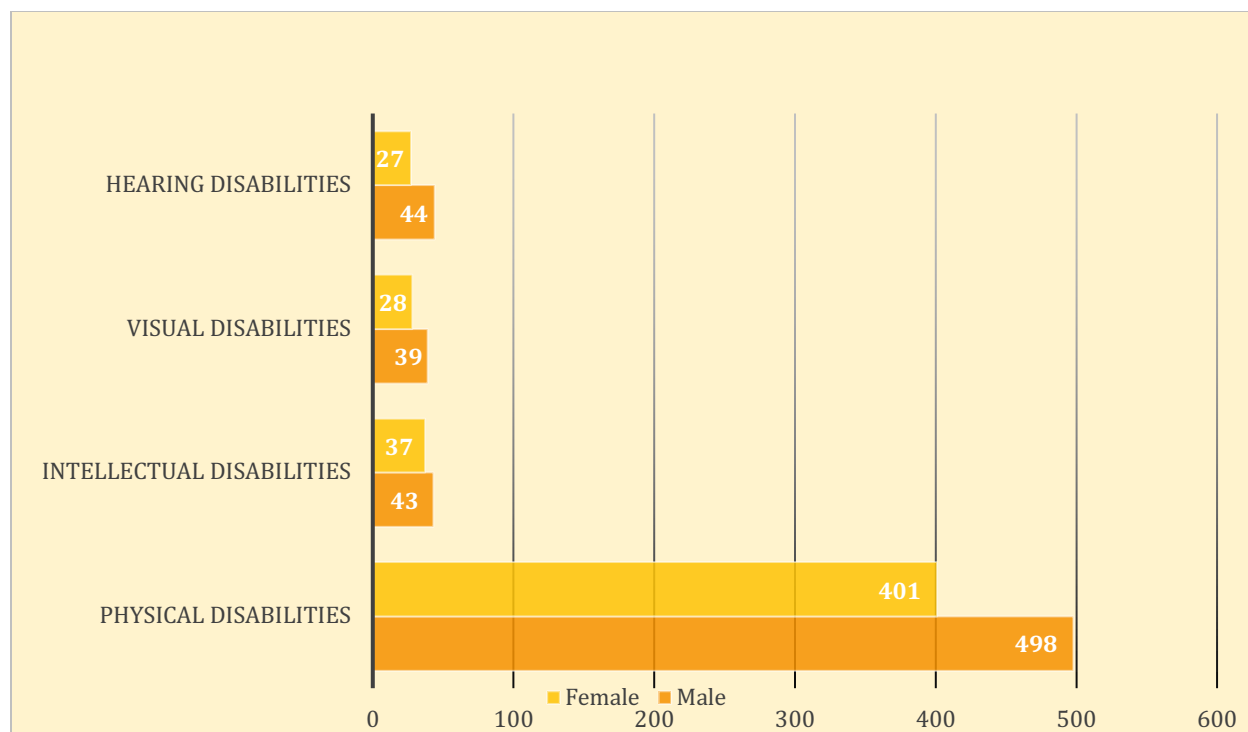


Figure 3: *The number of those living with disabilities*

Violence Against Women and Girls

Many young women, unable to continue their education for various reasons, must work in nearby jobs to support their families. However, they often receive unfair wages. Some women are deceived into working in the sex industry, where they face serious human rights abuses, including exploitation and human trafficking.

Young women frequently encounter obstacles to education. The weak enforcement of laws and inadequate protections heighten the risk of exploitation for women. Those who take advantage of women are often influential figures, including employers, colleagues, or even family members. Women have very few options for pursuing legal action against these offenders, which further complicates their situation.

According to a report by the Kayan Women's Organization on women and gender-based violence, women often take on the responsibility of meeting their family's daily livelihood needs, providing support for their families, and addressing health matters within the family. However, many women work in karaoke television (KTV) entertainment venues

due to unemployment and low-income jobs in the village. They are often denied employment benefits, including health care, which violates labour rights and protections.

The Implementation of Programs and Contributions of the Women and Child Department of the Karenni Interim Executive Council

To ensure equal access to rights and secure life for everyone, the Women and Child Department of the Karenni Interim Executive Council has implemented the activities detailed below to promote and protect the rights of women and children. These measures are based on the interim arrangement established in October 2023. Despite numerous financial and technical difficulties, the Interim Executive Council has prioritized the actions.

From October 2023 to October 2024, the Women and Child Department of the Karenni Interim Executive Council trained 30 teachers in basic nursery education and provided them with teaching materials. Additionally, personal hygiene items were distributed to 2,000 women in IDP camps and over 1,200 flood-affected women in hard-to-reach areas lacking support from other civil society groups.

In partnership with various women's organizations, we delivered support services to about 30 women and girls who faced different types of violence. The department also assisted at least 120 children injured by airstrikes and helped at least 150 pregnant women in need. Furthermore, the department has collaborated with the Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP) to draft legislation designed to prevent violence against women in Karenni State.

Since establishing the Department of Women and Children's Affairs, the program has collaborated with other women's organizations to address gender-based violence and support survivors. The department receives at least two cases reported per month, offers emergency assistance, and works toward justice for victims. However, many cases remain unreported. This is primarily due to stigma and the fear of reprisals survivors may encounter.

There is a need for policies and laws to prevent gender-based violence against women in the communities, especially during times of displacement due to conflict. Conducting public awareness campaigns is essential to strengthen the technical and institutional

mechanisms. Additionally, systems are still urgently needed to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure appropriate justice mechanisms are carried out.

This report's analysis is based on information gathered during implementation. It focuses on the situations of women and children, people with disabilities, the elderly, and particularly those living in IDP camps. The report aims to raise awareness among the public, civil society organizations (CSOs), and national and international donors about these vulnerable groups' urgent challenges and needs.

Summary and Recommendations:

This information relies on data collected by the Department of Humanitarian and Rehabilitation of the Karenni Interim Executive Council (KIEC) and feedback from local individuals. The challenges faced by women, mothers, children, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly in Karenni state need immediate attention along with the formulation of sustainable implementation plans.

The department urgently urges civil society organizations (CSOs), diplomats, and donors to engage in comprehensive, long-term strategies that fully safeguard the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly while also ensuring their essential needs are addressed.

1. To enforce the activation of international judicial mechanisms to address crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the illegal coup army. We also appeal to the United Nations and international organizations worldwide to hold the military accountable for their widespread and systematic human rights violations.
2. To prevent further loss of life, especially among women, children, and the elderly due to airstrikes and artillery fire, we urge the European Union and relevant countries to take immediate action. This includes imposing strict sanctions on the export and sale of arms and ammunition to the SAC, halting the export and sale of jet fuel, and considering the establishment of a no-fly zone to prevent aviation from being used in attacks.

3. Significantly increased budget funding is needed to provide increased emergency support for displaced women within the country and refugees along the border. This will allow on-ground organizations to ensure the timely provision of essential items, particularly women's personal hygiene supplies.
4. To provide security, protection, and service measures for women and children and allocate funds and resources for children's education. Support for implementing early childhood care and development is critical for children under age five.
5. To provide financial and technical support to develop economic recovery and rehabilitation for the survivors of the war, as well as for short-term and long-term plans and projects.
6. To provide financial and technical support for the security of persons with disabilities and the elderly. Emergency measures should be specifically designed and implemented to meet their needs.
7. To enhance access to nutritional supplements and healthcare for 3,000 pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Women and Child Department

