

Humanitarian NGOs call for immediate cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians and humanitarian access in Kachin and northern Shan, Myanmar

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As national and international NGOs operating in Kachin and northern Shan, Myanmar, we are deeply troubled by yet further escalation of armed conflict, including clashes directly impacting civilians throughout April and continuing into May, that has displaced and re-displaced thousands more civilians. Urgent action is required to save lives and meet widespread and growing humanitarian needs.

Following an escalation of armed conflict in early 2018 that displaced thousands across Kachin and northern Shan, we are profoundly alarmed about the latest events including clashes near IDP camps and civilian compounds leaving civilians killed and injured, and trapped in active conflict zones. We are deeply concerned for the safety and immediate needs for over 2,000 civilians, especially for the most vulnerable among them, who are currently confined in Awng Lawt, Sut Ra and Sut Ring Yang village, Tanai Township, and Man Wai village, Lainawng Hku area in Kamai sub-township, Kachin State. Their lives are at risk as repeated requests for safe passage and access to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance continue to be denied. These civilians are part of more than 5,000 displaced in April alone. The newly displaced civilians are worried about being forced to prematurely return to their villages that they have fled without any guarantee of safety and security. Returns must only happen voluntarily and when safety is guaranteed.

Over the course of last month, incidents of civilian casualties and injuries from the armed conflict including airstrikes, mortars and landmines continue to mount. It is critical that all warring parties uphold the protection of civilians and adhere to international human rights and humanitarian law, in these instances, specifically rule seven about the distinction between civilian objects and military objectives.

The current escalation of armed conflict, including airstrikes by Myanmar Government Armed Forces is some of the most widespread in recent years, with armed clashes in April reported in Hpakant, Tanai, Mogaung, Sumprabum, Injayang, Momauk, Chipwe and Waingmaw townships, exacerbating fear and anxiety throughout Kachin State. Existing humanitarian capacity to effectively respond is stretched as non-governmental organisations continue to serve over 100,000 already displaced people in Kachin and northern Shan states, with funding for humanitarian assistance failing to keep pace with humanitarian needs. It is paramount that funding for humanitarian assistance keeps pace with the escalating need and that humanitarian actors do everything within their capacity to advocate for civilian protection and unrestricted humanitarian access, and reinvigorate efforts to achieve peace and justice in Kachin and northern Shan State.

Recognising the urgency and acute humanitarian needs, we, as national and international agencies committed to the principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality, request all armed actors and authorities in Kachin and northern Shan State to:

- 1) Immediately cease hostilities in civilian areas and guarantee civilians safe passage from conflict zones.
- 2) Remove any and all restrictions on civilians accessing humanitarian assistance, and on humanitarian organisations to provide humanitarian goods and services.
- 3) Abide by and fulfil all obligations under International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, bringing an immediate end to violations of human rights and insecurity for civilians.
- 4) Redouble efforts and commitment to a durable and equitable political solution rather than armed conflict.

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