

Media Release From Karen Women Organization

Major New Report On Eastern Burma

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## **Pioneering women village heads targeted for systematic abuse by junta's troops across Eastern Burma**

*Walking Amongst Sharp Knives* reveals previously unreported abuses taking place against ethnic Karen women in Burma.

The practice of the Burmese Army to execute village heads has led to traditional Karen culture being turned upside-down, with women now being appointed village chiefs as they are seen as less likely to be killed. However, this change has put women in the frontline of human rights abuses. These abuses constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The abuses experienced or witnessed by the women chiefs include:

- Crucifixions
- People burnt alive
- Rape, including gang rape
- Many forms of torture, including beatings and water torture
- People buried up to their heads in earth and beaten to death
- Arbitrary executions
- Beheadings
- Slave labour

The women chiefs have been deliberately targeted for gender-based violence, including gang-rape. Pregnant and nursing women chiefs have been subjected to forced labour and grueling interrogation.

Yet despite these abuses the report also reveals the bravery and personal sacrifice of women in challenging injustice and defending their people.

“How can any woman feel safe under the Burma Army when even women village heads are openly targeted for abuse?” said Blooming Night Zan

KWO Joint Secretary 1 of KWO.

The Karen Women Organization is calling on the members of the United Nations Security Council to support the establishment of a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed by the Burmese military dictatorship.

“These women chiefs are unsung heroes,” said Blooming Night Zan “They are placing themselves not only at the front line of abuses by the Burma Army, but also at the forefront of the struggle for gender equality in Burma.”

The KWO is urgently calling for the Thai government to continue to provide protection to refugees fleeing human rights abuses in Burma. The Thai Army is currently seeking to repatriate over 3,000 Karen refugees in Tak province.

**For more information please contact:**

**Dah Eh Kler: 085-7269291**

**Blooming Night Zan: 086-2086943**

**[www.karenwomen.org](http://www.karenwomen.org)**