Ethnic minority women are disproportionately impacted by ongoing conflicts, protracted displacement and the COVID-19 pandemic in Kachin and northern Shan States. Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination have further resulted in their frequent exclusion from peace and security processes, meaning women’s unique experiences and important contributions are often absent from decisions that determine their futures. However, women refuse to be seen as passive ‘victims’ of these crises and have been working individually and with women’s rights organisations (WROs) to demand and create space for meaningful participation.

On the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women Peace and Security (WPS), this Policy Paper highlights the diverse and critical roles that women and their organisations are leading to prevent conflicts, protect their communities, build peace and promote relief and recovery efforts across Kachin and northern Shan States. While findings are structured under the WPS pillars, women’s and WROs’ participation in WPS is often holistic and inter-connected across the four pillars.

The paper advocates that women’s and WROs’ efforts must be acknowledged and supported to ensure their full, equal and meaningful participation across all pillars of the WPS Agenda and to bring Myanmar into line with its UNSCR 1325 obligations twenty years on.
MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

- Women's meaningful participation in peace and security goes beyond participation quotas and requires that diverse and marginalised women are actively engaged, their leadership capacities are supported and recognised and their rights to express their opinions and make decisions are upheld.
- Women across Myanmar face significant barriers to meaningfully participating in peace and security due to restrictive socio-cultural norms, unpaid care and domestic work, patriarchal governance structures and male-dominated peace and security sectors.
- These barriers are exacerbated for ethnic women and WROs, especially those living in conflict-affected communities and displacement camps due to discrimination, structural inequalities, funding restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic and practical challenges posed by language barriers and the location of meetings.

CONFLICT PREVENTION

- While women and WROs are at the forefront of community-level and informal conflict prevention efforts, especially in northern Shan State, their efforts remain widely overlooked and are not replicated in formal or national-level conflict prevention processes.
- Women lead a number of important community-level conflict prevention initiatives and are often considered to be more principled negotiators and mediators due to their gender and culturally prescribed calm approach, ability to find common ground and skills in deescalating tensions.
- Women and WROs play critical roles in leading early warning systems and deescalating conflicts due to their deep understandings of the conflicts and trusted positions within their communities – although women and their families face great security risks in undertaking this work.

PROTECTION OF RIGHTS

- WROs have made ground-breaking contributions to peace and security accountability by documenting armed actors’ use of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence against ethnic women and girls in order to raise awareness nationally and internationally.
- Responding to the increase in protection risks in conflict, displacement and the COVID-19 pandemic, WROs have established critical protection services across Kachin and northern Shan States, including women’s shelters and gender-based violence (GBV) committees.
- Women’s active involvement in protection initiatives has expanded their opportunities to participate in other aspects of peace and security as community members and leaders recognise their skills in leadership, decision-making and problem solving.

PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES

- Women and WROs hold holistic visions of peace which go beyond the cessation of armed fighting and require that underlying inequalities are addressed, and that peace is found at all levels – within individuals, households, communities and across the nation.
- Similarly, women peacebuilders’ and WROs’ peacebuilding initiatives in Kachin and northern Shan States are holistic, including activities such as community dialogue forums and advocacy events and covering topics ranging from women’s rights and GBV to the rule of law, democracy and disarmament.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hold the Government of Myanmar accountable to its international obligations under UNSCR 1325
- Support women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security sectors at all levels
- Remove restrictions to funding unregistered civil society organisations such as ethnic WROs
- Engage men, boys and religious and community leaders in all gender, protection and peacebuilding initiatives
- Shift from a protection to empowerment approach that serves as a catalyst for transformation
- Hold peace and security events in accessible locations with timely invitations and translation
- Engage men, boys and religious and community leaders in all gender, protection and peacebuilding initiatives
- Recognise the relief and recovery pillar as a strategic component of the WPS Agenda that holistically supports all other pillars
- Ensure women’s meaningful participation in returns and resettlement and in the COVID-19 recovery

ABOUT DPP

The Durable Peace Programme (DPP) seeks to achieve lasting and equitable peace and sustainable development in Kachin and northern Shan States. For more information please visit:

www.durablepeaceprogramme.com