

Statement of Concern
About the Vacant-Fallow-Virgin (VFV) Land Management Law in Myanmar –
and Expression of Solidarity with the Grassroots Campaign Against It

We are individuals who come from various international institutions, academic disciplines, intellectual traditions, political communities, and institutional platforms. We have worked on social justice oriented land issues in various parts of the world.

Our academic and professional work is guided by some kind of moral, ethical and political compass: we all adhere to a notion of ‘agrarian justice’, a sense of fairness, especially for those who have, for a long time, been marginalized economically, socially and politically: small farmers, landless rural workers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, artisanal fishers, internally displaced peoples and refugees; men and women, youth and children.

We believe that no one should lose their access to natural resources (land, water, forest) just because they are less able to prove, legally and formally, their rightful and just claim over such access – relative to the competing claims made by other powerful elites or the government. We believe that fairer and more democratic redistribution, recognition and restitution of land rights to the rural poor are key to peace-building processes.

This is the reason why we are deeply concerned about the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) Land Management Law in Myanmar. We support the right of rural villagers and their allies among civil society groups to criticize and oppose the VFV Law passed in 2012 as something that facilitated widespread land dispossession of rural population, especially of poor ethnic minorities, as well as internally displaced peoples and refugees. We are deeply concerned that the revised version of the 2012 VFV Law, dated September 2018, made the law even worse as it can potentially and very likely facilitate or legitimize further dispossession, could undermine serious attempts at peace-building, and is likely to criminalize rural poor people's land claims.

Thus, we support the voices of rural villagers, internally displaced peoples and refugees and their allies among civil society groups resisting the VFV Land Law – and their right to exercise their civil and political rights to resist without threat of retribution.

We support not only the call spearheaded by two national coalitions of grassroots groups, Land In Our Hands (LIOH) Alliance and Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA) to abolish the VFV Land Law – but even more importantly, their demand for the national government to pursue a social justice oriented land reform based on the principles of land redistribution, recognition and restitution. We also support the grassroots demand for guaranteeing the fundamental right of rural villagers and their allies to demand democratic representation and accountability with the Myanmar government in the process of their protesting against the VFV Land Law.

With reference to key documents and resources, including:

(1) See Joint Statement by Land In Our Hands (LIOH) and MATA on the VFV Land Law:

<https://lioh.org>;

(2) A commentary by the Transnational Institute (TNI):

<https://www.tni.org/en/article/a-declaration-of-war-on-us>

December 2018; Signed by:

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