



**"Kaw" Customary Land Seminar
Statement
"Our Customary Land, Our Life and Our Future"**

May 30, 2019

The "Kaw" Customary Land Seminar, held from May 29th to 30th, 2019, at Lay Wah, in the Karen National Union (KNU) administrated area of Hpa-an District was attended by 519 representatives from 56 organizations, including: local community and civil society representatives, donors, INGOs, political parties, and leaders of the KNU. The seminar discussed the problems and challenges facing "Kaw" customary land systems and the ways in which they can be strengthened and promoted, collaborating with other stakeholders.

"Kaw" are Karen customary land management systems. This is land which is collectively used, managed, conserved and governed. These practices are based on the conservation of land, forest, water, and other natural resources, and emerge from a combination of traditional value systems and traditional/customary law. Therefore, these practices are inherently linked to the preservation of Karen culture and beliefs and local biodiversity and ecosystems protection.

Importantly, the "Kaw" (Customary Land) management systems have never been influenced by any external authorities; they are a deeply entwined set of land management practices, strong local administrative justice mechanisms and traditional beliefs which holistically come together. These beliefs and practices are representative of a comprehensive traditional relationship to land, from which has emerged a strong set of land management and governance practices which we call "Kaw".

Therefore, the collective preservation of land, forest, water, natural resources and the environment inherently requires the preservation and maintenance of Karen "Kaw" management systems. We must have well-developed and well-maintained "Kaw" management systems which address the challenges of the current political situation. As a result of this, the KNU land and forest policies include a full recognition of "Kaw" land management systems, and have set up and begun implementing policies.

According to research conducted between 2015 and 2018, it was found that there are 198 "Kaw" customary land systems in Kawthoolei. Community-based research focused on three "Kaw" found that these customary land management systems successfully provided land protection and sustainable livelihoods, and they are still very much relevant and applicable to the current situation.

The current Myanmar government's Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) Land Management Law and other land laws fundamentally undermine the authority of Karen "Kaw" customary land systems. These systems, in contrast with Myanmar government land laws, allow for collective participation in political decision-making. Suppressing such customary systems hinders the peace building process, preventing the establishment of federalism. The Myanmar government's land laws therefore must be

abolished and accordingly rewritten. In addition, we strongly oppose the current Survey Law (draft) which will hinder the peace building process while posing threats to the maintenance of "Kaw" Customary land systems.

Therefore, in order to have strong and effective realization of "Kaw" customary land governance systems, as independently allow to be governed and in line with the KNU's land and forest policies, we make a firm commitment to continue to strengthen and implement the "Kaw" customary land governance systems within our administrative territories.

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