

## **Burma: Ensure Women's Role in Peace Talks**

### **Government, Ethnic Armed Groups Should Promote Women's Rights in Political Transition**

(New York) – Burma's government and ethnic armed groups should ensure that women meaningfully participate in efforts to end the country's longstanding armed conflicts, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The government should also make women's rights a priority as [Burma](#) continues its political transition. In late August 2016, the National League for Democracy-led government that was elected in November 2015, and various armed groups will meet at the "Panglong 21st Century Peace Conference" to begin talks.

The 18-page report, "[A Gentleman's Agreement': Women's Participation in Burma's Peace Negotiations and Political Transition](#)," examines women's participation in peace efforts in Burma and the devastating impacts of the country's wars on women. Women have been almost entirely absent from nearly four years of peace negotiations to end the fighting in Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi heads the National League for Democracy, and a few other women hold leadership positions in groups involved in these negotiations, but there have been only 10 women among 195 senior delegates in 8 major peace efforts since 2012.

"Women in Burma are entitled to a meaningful and comprehensive role in determining their country's future," said [Sarah Taylor](#), women's rights advocate at Human Rights Watch. "Burma's women have long endured abuses but have worked hard to advance human rights. Their voices should now be front and center."

In May 2016, Human Rights Watch spoke with more than 25 Burmese women's rights activists, armed group representatives, ceasefire monitors, and foreign diplomats. Women's groups reported that government officials and leaders of non-state armed groups have long treated women with disdain or as "spoilers" when they pressed for the inclusion of women's rights in talks. One leading women's rights activist said "tea break advocacy" – during breaks in meetings – has often been the only space for women to influence delegates in ongoing negotiations.

Women in Burma need a greater role in the peace process not only because they suffer many of the consequences of the conflicts, but also because their participation can help ensure that a full range of human rights concerns are addressed in any peace agreement, Human Rights Watch said. This is crucial for obtaining a long and durable peace.

Burmese civilians have been victims of abuses during armed conflict since Burma's independence in 1948. Fighting between government forces and ethnic armed groups has surged on and off in recent years, and ceasefire agreements have unraveled. In addition to including women as full partners in peace talks, the new government should abolish or revise laws enacted by the previous administration that curtail the rights of women and criminal laws that provide inadequate protection to women, Human Rights Watch said. There is no specific law criminalizing violence against women at home or

sexual harassment in the workplace, nor does current law allow women to seek protection from the state, including restraining orders on violent men.

International [human rights law](#) and the principles contained in [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) and [subsequent resolutions](#) on [women, peace, and security](#) oblige governments to take steps to remove discrimination against women in public life, and to respect their right to take part in public affairs. Such action should set the standard for the essential role of women in Burma in preventing and ending armed conflicts. This includes peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction.

“Burma’s government and military and ethnic armed groups should all commit to promoting respect for women’s rights,” Taylor said. “These parties can start at the upcoming Panglong Peace Conference by ensuring that women have a prominent place at the negotiating table.”