



Statement on armed conflict and political exploitation of the COVID 19 crisis

Date: 05 May 2020

COVID 19 is a global health crisis which all people must work together to overcome. In Myanmar, the numbers of COVID 19 positive patients are increasing daily.

At this time, all people's health and safety must take priority over the economy in Myanmar. Continued economic expansion and re-opening of factories and workplaces, together with low budget allocation to fight COVID-19, will cause increased infection, and make the virus more difficult to control.

The Tatmadaw's instigation of armed conflicts in Chin, Karen, Shan and Rakhine ethnic areas, is undermining the fight against COVID 19, as well as peace-seeking efforts. Even though more people are dying from the armed conflict than COVID 19, there is little attention on this, and humanitarian aid is being blocked to the displaced.

The ongoing conflict is causing difficulty and suffering for local communities, who are being deprived of their right to access news and media, due to cutting of internet services, and are facing blockage of food supplies. In such circumstances, how can these people hope to access COVID 19 prevention and services?

At this critical time, there must be timely, accurate, free flow of information, and an end to restrictions on access to news and media, the country's Fourth Estate.

During public stay home to obey the law to reduce Covid 19, military land grabbing continue, suing the farmers, centralized control permits for large scale investments and resource extraction projects are wasting the country's natural resources for their benefits will negative impact to peace process which should be spent on prevention of COVID-19.

There is little support for necessary medicines, services and awareness-raising by local people and health workers in the ethnic areas, who are doing their best to prevent and control COVID-19. Meanwhile, little international aid is reaching the ethnic areas.

Therefore, we make the following recommendations:

- (1) During this critical time for the country, the Myanmar government needs to suspend factory operations, and use the country's budget to fully support food needs of workers and other people, until the virus situation is stable
- (2) The Tatmadaw must stop instigating armed conflicts in ethnic areas, particularly Chin, Karen, Shan and Rakhine, so that there can be a concerted national effort against COVID 19.
- (3) The national budget must be spent on urgent programming to deal with COVID-19, rather than on military expenses.
- (4) To provide adequate aid and services to areas where there are IDPs; to stop cutting internet services, so that local people can access news, and have immediate access to information; and to let the entire country have accurate, unbiased information.
- (5) COVID 19 is a critical issue for the whole country, and should not be dealt with just by centralized decision making. A committee including technicians, economists, scientists, ethnic leaders, CSOs and media, should be formed to address this crisis.
- (6) The central government must immediately suspend all permits and MOUs for large scale investments and natural resource extraction, and must hand over ownership, management and decision-making rights to local ethnic people, so they can increase support for communities and health workers fighting against COVID 19; and international support must go directly to local areas.
- (7) We respect and thank all those who are investing their lives to deal with COVID 19 and the ongoing armed conflict. We believe that we can fight against COVID 19 together, with correct information and correct means.

Contact information

(1) Naw Blossom 09954020650

(2) Khun Oo 09765600812