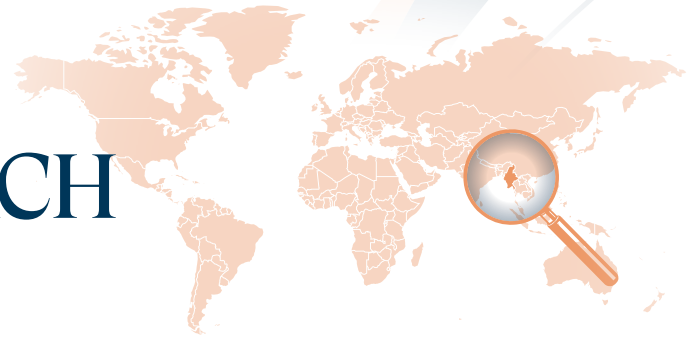


# ADVANCING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CRSV SURVIVORS



The following case study has been written by an independent consultant on behalf of the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR). This case study is informed by a combination of desktop research, document analysis and interviews. It therefore reflects these perspectives and findings, as compiled and written by the consulting author(s). Interviewees have been anonymized to ensure their safety and privacy but GIJTR extends its gratitude for the time and participation of all interviewees.

## A Case Study from Myanmar

Author: AJAR

### Introduction and Background

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) has been engaged in survivor work in Myanmar/Burma since 2013. A number of organizations participating in this research have been long-term partners of AJAR with a history of working with women survivors of violence in various regions where minority ethnic groups constitute a majority of the local populations. Following a military coup in 2021, others from majority Bamar regions—where rights-based organizations were previously not present—have joined the program. They bring along both a new understanding and perspectives on survivorship.

For this case study, the research team has relied on a combination of desk research and in-depth interviews with partner organizations. In order to provide a detailed explanation of the pre-coup legal and policy environment, relevant documents were reviewed and summarized. Information on more recent developments, particularly about National Unity Government (NUG) attitudes and policymaking with regard to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), as well as other attempts for advocacy and reform in the ethnic areas, was gathered via news reporting and insights from partner organizations. The research team also relied on previous AJAR research relating to international accountability mechanisms and their engagement with Myanmar people.

The research team interviewed eight staff members from various partner organizations. Two-thirds of the women interviewed are members of long-standing AJAR partners who have been working with women survivors in ethnic areas. The remaining women interviewees represent more recent partnerships and organizations primarily based either in the majority Bamar areas or on the border, working with a broader scope and a different definition of “survivorship.” In-depth interviews were conducted to highlight the current developments working with survivors of CRSV on the ground, including urgent needs, possibilities, and limitations. The interviews were conducted in Burmese via Zoom, aside for one that had to be conducted via voicemail due to connectivity issues, and then later transcribed and translated into English.

## Limitations

### **CRSV as a new concept/Meaning of “survivor”:**

CRSV is a new concept in Myanmar. When it comes to survivors, most women-led ethnic human rights organizations work with a much broader definition of “conflict-related violence” that includes indirect victims (victimization based on that of a close family member, in particular a husband) and direct victims of a wide variety of human rights violations, with sexual violence being one of them. On the other hand, organizations working with the concept of gender-based violence (GBV) tend to focus on violations committed beyond a conflict setting, especially in the domestic arena. This lack of distinction is also clear from the interviews conducted. The new partner organizations, which were partly established as a reaction to the post-coup violence, also use the definition of survivor even more broadly to cover those oppressed by the regime without necessarily linking those abuses to particular human rights violations. Consequently, insights drawn from the discussion cannot always be extrapolated to all victims/survivors of CRSV.

**Restrictions on access to survivors:** Due to ongoing security concerns and difficulties with creating secure and stable communication channels, both AJAR and the other partners struggle with establishing regular communication with survivors and organizing in-person activities. Most activities currently take place online, while field engagement relies on a network of community organizers. For this reason, no survivors were specifically interviewed for this research, although their inputs and reflections were used from the documentation of previous activities conducted by AJAR in cooperation with its partners. Details of specific cases were also shared (in strict confidence) during the interview process.

## **The Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation**

In 2014, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) launched the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR), a consortium of nine international organizations focused on offering holistic, integrative and multidisciplinary approaches to issues of truth, justice and reconciliation. GIJTR works primarily with local populations, civil society organizations, survivors and governments to develop transitional justice approaches that are victim-centered, collaborative, and support dignity, respect, inclusion, and transparency in societies emerging from conflict or periods of authoritarian rule. Since its founding, GIJTR has engaged 801 local civil society organizations; 78 countries; 43 publications; collection of over 8,000 narratives of human rights violations; and supported 588 civil society organizations dealing with human rights violations.

**For more information, please visit [gijtr.org](https://gijtr.org).**



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**Research limited to women:** Both AJAR's and the partner organizations' work focuses primarily on women survivors, and therefore only occasionally includes male victims of CRSV. There is anecdotal evidence of such instances of violations that are said to have only increased since the military coup. However, so far, there has not been any comprehensive research conducted to investigate the extent of these violations, let alone address them in any form. Consequently, conclusions drawn in this paper are based almost entirely on experiences working with women victims/survivors.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Following its struggle for independence, Myanmar (Burma) has been constantly marred by armed conflict between the ruling regime and a wide variety of mostly ethnic-based armed forces struggling for larger autonomy within the union. The intensity of the conflict(s) has varied over the years, with certain Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs) taking center stage, then retreating and signing ceasefires with the military, only for them to break down again. The oldest ongoing conflict is connected to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA/political wing of the KNU) engaged in a struggle with the military in the southeast of the country (Mon and Kayin states, as well as the Tanintharyi Region) for decades, which only lost its intensity when the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed in 2015, which included the KNLA/KNU among its signatories. The violations from the military continued, however, culminating in the 2021 coup and a breakdown of the agreement. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced both inside the country and across the border, many of whom had been living in Thai refugee camps for generations.

Another well-documented and lasting conflict involves the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in the far north of the country. From the 1960s onwards, the KIA grew to be one of the most highly respected EROs. The northern area—mainly the Northeast—has also been the site of power struggles among a variety of ethnic organizations often engaged in fighting against each other to secure their own territory (e.g., Ta'ang National Liberation Army), making certain areas of the state highly volatile. A newer edition to the ethnicity-based conflict map is Rakhine State on the western coast where the relatively young Arakan Army (AA) has been conducting a successful military campaign since 2018, resulting in the group effectively controlling about two-thirds of the state by 2021.

In the same state, the Muslim Rohingya have been experiencing decades of persecution that flared up again in 2012 and then 2015 and 2016 to culminate in widespread ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Myanmar army and the subsequent exodus of a million Rohingya mostly to Bangladesh, where many remain under harrowing conditions confined to large refugee camps. Those still inside the country are largely segregated in internally displaced people (IDP) camps or other isolated communities and continue to face atrocities on a regular basis given that the 1982 Citizenship Law does not provide them with any legal status.

Since the military coup in 2021, the conflict has engulfed large areas of the country that traditionally have experienced limited or no armed violence in the past. Some of the fiercest fighting has taken

place in small and relatively sparsely populated ethnic areas such as the Karenni (Kayah) and Chin states, devastating both areas and displacing a large number of people internally and into neighboring Thailand and India's Mizoram State. However, while these areas display some pre-existing ethnic armed forces and governance structures, the majority of Bamar central areas of Upper Burma, Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay regions in particular are facing such atrocities for the first time, as the People's Defense Forces (PDF), either in alignment with the parallel NUG or independent from it, resist the violent advances of the military. As of 2023, very few areas, mostly those surrounding Yangon and the capital Naypyidaw, remain unaffected by open conflict.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

Women have been particularly exposed in the decades-long armed conflicts, high militarization, and political repression—where they are disproportionately affected. In addition to the gendered impact of widespread human rights violations against civilians, such as arbitrary killings, torture, forced displacement, and destruction of properties, women have endured a high prevalence of CRSV for decades.<sup>1</sup>

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have long documented sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by the Myanmar army against ethnic communities, in particular the use of rape as a weapon of war and oppression—and as a tactic to hurt and humiliate girls, women, and men. Victims mostly belong to minority ethnic groups, including the Kachin, Shan, Ta'ang, Karen, and other communities.<sup>2</sup> Various United Nations (UN) bodies have also repeatedly drawn attention to the history of Myanmar's security forces perpetrating sexual violence as part of their military policy.<sup>3</sup> For instance, Rohingya women have been subjected to exceptionally brutal manners of killing, torture, rape, and sexual violence. Rape and sexual violence have been an integral part of the military's strategy, indicating genocidal intent to destroy the Rohingya people.<sup>4</sup>

Although women and girls are disproportionately affected, CRSV in Myanmar is also perpetrated against men and boys. Incidents of sexual violence against men are under-reported due to fear of stigmatization, reprisal, and ostracism by their communities.<sup>5</sup> The UN Fact-Finding Mission, for example, documented sexual violence and sexual humiliation in the context of detention of men in Kachin and Shan states suspected of being members of ethnic armed groups.<sup>6</sup> This sexualized form of torture in detention, as well as incidents of rape, were also documented concerning the attacks on the Rohingya.<sup>7</sup>

The response to the anti-coup movement in 2021 shows that SGBV continues to be used by the junta as a brutal tool to intimidate and maintain their power and control. Reports indicate that members of security forces have verbally and sexually harassed female protesters. Particularly concerning is the differential treatment of women during interrogation and detention. There are reports of sexual abuse behind bars, including beatings on genitals and sexual threats. Many cases of extrajudicial killings perpetrated by the military are also often preceded by sexual violence. According to regular updates published by the Women's League of Burma (WLB), a consortium of 12 women's organizations, Myanmar army soldiers often use rape as a weapon of war. While dozens of cases are reported monthly, comprehensive data is challenging to compile.

Although less widespread and less reported for fear of repercussion or perceived betrayal, members of EROs and the PDFs are also responsible for violations against civilians, including

women. In a highly publicized case in May 2023, members of a local PDF group in Sagaing murdered seven people, including three underaged women, who were also raped. According to the NUG, four members of the PDF were arrested and allegedly put into the judicial process, but then released without punishment.<sup>8</sup> This and similar cases suggest that impunity is endemic, regardless of the armed forces responsible.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REDRESS

### Legal Framework

#### A. Domestic Legislation

Domestic law in Myanmar contains rules that offer protection from SGBV. Myanmar military law also prohibits rape, although soldiers are very rarely prosecuted for that crime. While the Myanmar Penal Code (from 1860) prohibits rape and other forms of sexual assault, it is inadequate to ensure victims of sexual violence full rights to accountability and reparations. The definition of rape in Section 375 is minimal and vague and does not meet international human rights standards. For example, it does not include rape of men, or rape in marriage, which is in direct contravention with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Since 2014, a draft Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women (PoVAW) Law has been developed and discussed, but fails to meet international standards and does not address the legal deficiencies in Myanmar's domestic law, including a lack of definition of CRSV. The draft law does not explicitly include crimes committed by the military, nor does it allow for security forces to be investigated and prosecuted by civilian courts. Although women's organizations and international actors were consulted, the military reportedly "refused to accept a modern definition of rape and any measures that would remove impunity for perpetration of such crimes."<sup>9</sup> Thus, the PoVAW Law was never adopted.

The 1959 Defense Services Act stipulates that soldiers who commit crimes of murder, homicide, and rape should be tried in a civilian criminal court; however, constitutionally, the commander-in-chief has final decision-making power, so cases are almost never transferred, and the control remains entirely in the hands of the military. Similarly, when it comes to violations committed by the police, the 1995 Myanmar Police Force Maintenance of Discipline Law provides for special police courts to prosecute offenses. Consequently, the current legal praxis ensures almost complete impunity for crimes committed by security forces.

The new parallel NUG government (as opposed to the military-led State Administration Council) has made commitments in its draft constitution to advance transitional justice in the country. Aside from the ongoing documentation efforts conducted by its multiple ministries, the biggest indicator for this is the establishment of a Joint Coordination Committee on Transitional Justice (JCC-TJ) of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) coordinating body between the NUG, EROs, and members of civil society dedicated to the development of transitional justice-related policies, including those for reparations. However, concerns by certain members have often been voiced, that a transitional justice framework is not considered as a priority by the NUG and the process is instead driven by civil society members, often with a lesser focus on reparations and more on criminal justice—compounded by the fact that women's issues often take second place at NUCC discussions and are not included when questions of security arise.

## B. International Treaties and Conventions

Myanmar is also party to several international treaties and resolutions applicable for instances of CRSV, most notably the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which obligates states to stop discrimination against women, including anything that prevents women from complete protection and fulfilment of their rights, encompassing protection against SGBV. The CEDAW Committee has also issued general recommendations that detail the obligations of states to develop legislation to prevent violence against women in conflict, to investigate and punish it, and to ensure women's access to justice, reparations, and support.<sup>10</sup> These recommendations are considered authoritative statements for state parties to the CEDAW.

Other relevant treaties include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1984), the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), and the Geneva Conventions (1949). UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) stipulates that all parties to armed conflict should take special measures to protect women from all forms of violence, particularly sexual violence and violence during conflict, and end impunity for those responsible for such crimes. Consequent Resolution 1820 (2008) also recognizes CRSV as a tactic of war. Both of these resolutions are legally binding in Myanmar.

Based on the recommendations prescribed, the former National League for Democracy (NLD) government designed a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013–2022) to accelerate CEDAW implementation. However, this plan failed both in addressing GBV in conflict and in that it proved impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict. In December 2018, a joint communiqué with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict was signed by the government of Myanmar and requires the military to issue clear orders prohibiting sexual violence and to ensure that alleged violations are quickly investigated and prosecuted. However, no concrete actions have yet been taken in this regard.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR REDRESS: PROSECUTIONS AND REPARATIONS

### Prosecutions

**Domestic Mechanisms.** In Myanmar, SGBV crimes are very rarely prosecuted, especially when committed by members of the security forces such as the military. There have been a few cases brought to courts—mainly military courts—with a handful of convictions. However, there has been a lack of transparency and accountability regarding the process and the sentencing.<sup>11</sup> Interference by the military as well as a corrupt police and judiciary remain the main obstacles to justice.<sup>12</sup> Even when cases are being handled within the civilian justice system, military interference at all levels makes it extremely difficult for politically sensitive cases to move forward.<sup>13</sup>

These challenges within the Myanmar justice system are even more exacerbated in relation to crimes committed against the Rohingya. In May 2020, the President's Office formed the "Criminal Investigation and Prosecution Body" to investigate and prosecute cases in Rakhine State based on the recommendations of the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE). However, the ICOE categorically dismissed evidence of sexual violence, calling it "inconclusive and unreliable." Other accountability or truth-telling mechanisms established by past governments are said to lack independence and impartiality, including the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC), which is not a reliable actor to provide justice for SGBV committed by State actors.<sup>14</sup> Since 2012, several commissions have been established to investigate the events in Rakhine State, with the most recent one being the

ICOE. Serious concerns over the commission's independence and impartiality have been highlighted, including statements from its members that show bias and conflicts of interest.<sup>15</sup>

The NUG has made promises to prosecute those committing serious human rights violations among its own troops, particularly following the heavily publicized case of four very young women who were raped and killed by a local defense team affiliated with the NUG in 2022. Although this was a direct violation of the Military Code of Conduct published by the NUG in 2021, and the perpetrators had been said to be put under a judicial procedure, they were soon released. According to other human rights groups, dismissal from local administration when such cases are reported is still the rule, which does not encourage already scarce reporting for fear of repercussions and stigmatization.<sup>16</sup> Even if such inaction can partly be attributed to the NUG's lack of effective control over PDFs and other resistance groups, it doesn't excuse the culture of impunity that continues to be engendered by all sides.

**International Mechanisms.** The Fact-Finding Mission for Myanmar (FFM) established by the UN Human Rights Council (2017–2019) was mandated to establish the facts and circumstances of alleged human rights violations and abuses in Myanmar since 2011, in particular in Rakhine, Kachin, and northern Shan states. The extensive report published by the FFM determined that the Myanmar military committed genocide against the Rohingya in Rakhine State and war crimes and crimes against humanity in Kachin and Shan states. It also released a thematic report entitled “Sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar and the gendered impact of its ethnic conflicts.”

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) was established in 2019 by the UN Human Rights Council with an open-ended mandate to gather evidence of the most serious crimes and violations of international law committed in Myanmar since 2011 and to prepare the prosecution of perpetrators by “competent courts.” It has also been monitoring post-coup violence and is gathering evidence from this context. The IIMM has stated that sexual and gender-based crimes will be “at the heart of their work,” and that it will consider the multiple reports about these crimes “when selecting and prioritizing the incidents and cases to which it will devote resources.” However, there have been no specific reports published regarding CRSV in Myanmar.

None of these mechanisms has power to prosecute any cases they gather evidence on, as this task is primarily expected to be completed by the International Criminal Court (ICC), to which Myanmar is not a party. A recent decision by the pre-trial chamber, however, allows for an investigation of alleged crimes committed against the Rohingya that took place at least in part in the territory of Bangladesh (which is a state party). The ICC is competent to adjudicate crimes such as rape, torture, and sexual violence, which may constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. However, difficulties in having standing to prosecute sexual crimes might arise, as at least one element of such crimes must have occurred in Bangladesh.

There is also currently a case against Myanmar at the ICJ for alleged violations of the Genocide Convention in relation to crimes committed against the Rohingya. The case was brought in 2019 by The Gambia, which is, like Myanmar, a party to the Genocide Convention. The ICJ in theory could interpret such sexual crimes as constituting acts of genocide. However, it remains unknown whether ICJ judges will be open to a more progressive interpretation of genocide than they have used in the past, which essentially defines it as “killing.”

A number of universal jurisdiction cases have also been filed in Argentina, Turkey, Indonesia, and Germany. While the case in Argentina was filed before the coup and seeks to prosecute crimes committed against the Rohingya, the other submissions are more recent, with a focus on

prosecuting members of the Myanmar military for crimes committed after the coup, such as torture in detention (which can also include sexual crimes). These include the case in Turkey filed by the UK-based rights group Myanmar Accountability Project in 2022, as well as systematic killing, rape, torture, imprisonment, disappearances, and other acts amounting to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes filed by human rights group Fortify Rights with the Federal Public Prosecutor General of Germany.

**Lack of State-Level Reparatory Measures.** The Myanmar Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure include provisions aimed at facilitating the delivery of reparations and remedies. However, authorities do not implement them, and there is no accountability for this lack of compliance with the law. There is extremely limited precedent or established practice for the provision of effective remedies or reparation for victims of criminal acts in Myanmar, particularly when such crimes involve state actors.

In addition, victims or survivors do not have the option of bringing a claim before an administrative court, as there is no administrative law or tribunals.<sup>17</sup> Disputes between the public and the administration are generally handled informally by local leaders or through the General Administration Department (GAD). Finally, while military courts and police courts are largely used for handling human rights violations committed by security forces, the laws governing military and police procedures do not encompass the provision of remedies and reparations. Although “financial compensation” has been paid by the army to some victims of human rights violations, it has generally been done without acknowledging or apologizing for the atrocities. The end result has been a process more akin to the military buying victims’ silence.

**Civil Society Reparation Efforts.** In the absence of government services, civil society actors, including community-based organizations and other local civil society groups, as well as international organizations and agencies, have taken the lead in responding to people’s needs, offering a broad range of assistance and services. These organizations can be broadly categorized into three groups: providers under the general humanitarian and development aid framework; providers responding specifically to violence against women; and human rights organizations working under a transitional justice framework.

The assistance provided under the **humanitarian and development aid framework** responds to specific needs of victims of human rights violations, even though they are not developed or provided for that specific purpose, thus rendering their reparative value questionable. The types of assistance and services provided vary and can cover a broad range of needs. In IDP and refugee camps, this may include financial support, medical care, food, shelter, sanitation, water, electricity, as well as vocational training and, in very limited cases, psychosocial support or counselling.

**Groups working against GBV** often refer to this work as violence against women (VAW), with the terms often used interchangeably. Marginalized ethnic communities, and in particular ethnic women’s grassroot organizations, are at the forefront of this service provision. While the majority of attention is given to prevention through awareness raising, groups often try to support survivors’ access to health and medical assistance through referrals to clinics and practitioners and by providing funds to help cover medical costs. Services also sometimes include short-term psychosocial support via self-help groups, mediation, or counselling. A few are able to provide safe housing or shelter services and emergency support for women who have to flee their community. Current anecdotal evidence suggests that the increasingly volatile security situation post-coup has led to the further reduction of such shelters, as people are constantly



forced to flee from areas of ongoing fighting. Legal assistance was scarce even before the coup and current distrust in government services has diminished such initiatives even further. International organizations also provide some services in this field, often in cooperation with local CSOs and NGOs.

A number of Myanmar CSOs have developed significant expertise related to **transitional justice**, including documentation of violations, commemoration, trauma healing, and emergency assistance for victims. Some of these initiatives include women survivors and victims of GBV. Since the early 2000s, human rights documentation has been a key focus of civil society. Many groups, particularly those linked to ethnic minorities, have independently published reports and briefings exposing human rights violations. Between 2015 and 2021, several commemorative truth-telling events took place, for instance, remembering the rape and murder of two Kachin teachers, the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society's Uprising Museum, Assistance Association of Political Prisoners' (AAPP's) Museum on Political Prisoners, and truth-telling symposiums with former political prisoners in Yangon and Mandalay, among others. Assistance provided for victims and survivors by local groups has included financial support, educational stipends, health care, psychosocial or mental health support, as well as employment opportunities and livelihood assistance. This type of assistance can more easily be considered "reparative," depending on how much acknowledgement and conceptualization there is of why the assistance is provided and how it is linked to past human rights violations.

Coordinated by the human rights documentation network ND-Burma and other CSOs, including AJAR as one of its international partners, the **Reparations Working Group** was created in 2018 to raise awareness around reparations with government bodies and advocates for nationwide reparations policy. The working group was launched with the first-ever victims' needs assessment conducted in the country with the participation of 170 victims/survivors. The assessment resulted in a report entitled "You cannot ignore us: Victims of human rights violations from 1970–2017 outline their desires for justice,"<sup>18</sup> where interviewees overwhelmingly stated their desire for redress. It also included recommendations to the government, including drafting a reparations law. The working group was later requested by the pre-coup government to draft such a bill, which they declined, drafting a reparations policy instead. Work, however, has been suspended, first due to COVID-19 in 2020, and remains so following the 2021 coup.

## **Innovations, Opportunities, and Challenges**

AJAR belongs to those in the third group approaching CRSV with a transitional justice lens. The organization has been initiating and involved in projects in Myanmar since 2013, with a primary focus on empowering survivors (particularly women survivors) of conflict-related violence (including sexual violence), through participatory action research that encompasses traditional and innovative documentation methods, healing, community-building, and skill-building, which leads to advocacy with relevant stakeholders. The ultimate aim, through exchanges and storytelling, is for solidarity among survivors to be built that goes beyond ethno-religious boundaries and creates the foundations for a movement that's driving change in Myanmar society toward prevention of and protection from conflict-

## related violence, recognition and reparations for harms done, and an end to impunity for those who perpetrate those crimes.

This vision has remained more or less intact following the 2021 military coup, but the unprecedented scale of violence has affected and transformed the meaning of “survivorship” and created increased awareness around the need for mental health and psychosocial support. It also further highlights the importance of transitional justice processes, particularly the documentation of violations committed by the military, with the primary goal of evidence gathering for future international (or potentially domestic) accountability mechanisms. On the level of policymaking, the NUG has also been showing renewed interest in incorporating transitional justice into its law making (even if attention is likely given to prosecutions and much less to potential reparations for victims). For the past two years, AJAR has been tapping into and partially driving these processes, providing both local and international expertise and technical and financial resources to build both civil society and government capacity. Since 2021, AJAR has worked with other local organizations to integrate the transitional justice approach through documentation and survivor support. A Transitional Justice Alliance has been formed with the aim of fostering exchange to increase accountability, truth, and justice for serious violations of international humanitarian law and flagrant violations of international human rights law committed by all parties in Myanmar/Burma. In addition, AJAR has also launched its Burmese language Justice Resource Center to facilitate self-study on topics including truth-telling and reparations.

### **BUILDING A NETWORK OF RESILIENCE AND SOLIDARITY**

AJAR’s approach from the beginning has been to work in partnership with other members of Myanmar civil society with an affinity toward supporting women survivors of violence. Consequently, most of these projects have been conducted in conjunction with long-established ethnic women organizations working in areas of ongoing conflict for decades in Kachin, Karen (Kayin), and Shan States, and most importantly, the Kachin Women’s Association of Thailand (KWAT), the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO), and the Ta’ang Women’s Organization (TWO). These organizations have been working tirelessly to empower ethnic women in general and women survivors in particular, and reduce human rights violations in their areas, with special attention to all forms of violence against women. Within this framework and with the support of AJAR, they have been implementing small-scale projects, with elements of trauma healing, self-care, documentation, advocacy, and skills development, as well as limited livelihood activities and emergency assistance to build resilience that allows them to act within their communities. AJAR has also partnered with an assistance organization of former female political prisoners, mostly originating from urban, Burmese-speaking

areas, to provide them with similar types of support and connection.

In response to the mass violations committed against the Rohingya Muslims in 2016–2017 that resulted in a mass exodus to Bangladesh, AJAR started a separate program with the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum to support women survivors languishing in refugee camps around Cox’s Bazaar. AJAR follows a similar approach, assisting the creation of space spaces and support groups while also offering awareness-raising and capacity-building opportunities. Along the lines of solidarity and movement building, AJAR also facilitates exchanges with survivors inside Myanmar, which could gain more traction following post-coup rapprochement and acknowledgement from the Burmese side regarding the violations committed against the Rohingya.

Before the coup, intending to build a survivor movement, there were many attempts from different NGOs, including AJAR, to foster the meeting of women survivors from different ethnic areas of the country. The annual survivor gatherings have taken place and contributed to trust-building beyond one’s direct community and fostering a sense of shared burden, even if relations are challenging to maintain outside these events. Partners have reported that “during that time, the survivors felt stronger, as they had the opportunity to interact with members of other ethnic groups.” Learning exchanges are also facilitated whenever a group of survivors and certain members of partner organizations visit Timor-Leste, where, with the assistance of AJAR and its partners, survivor women have been organizing themselves into support groups for collective care for a while. These gatherings and exchanges, however, had to be suspended following the pandemic and the coup. Only recently have some partners restarted organizing smaller-scale survivor exchanges among women from the same ethnic group/area, such as in Karen State.

The 2021 coup has significantly altered the civil society landscape. New organizations have been established, and certain issue areas have become “popular.” Human rights documentation has also become a major point of interest and, in addition, long-term partners are seeking to improve their documentation skills. Some are intending to add documentation of violations to their ongoing activities; others, such as those popping up in the Burmese heartland, across the border, and in ethnic areas with little to no history of large-scale human rights abuses, have started to regard documentation as a crucial arena of action against the military. Although these organizations rarely focus solely on women survivors of CRSV, they almost always assist in such cases. They also tend to work with a much broader concept of “victimhood/survivorhood,” influenced by the totalizing nature of the current conflict that is affecting the population of Myanmar on an unprecedented scale.

## CONSTRUCTING SURVIVORHOOD

Though many CSO members and activist women have suffered violations themselves, few have identified as “survivors.” Survivors tend to be viewed as people from the community (often women) with little formal activist experience (and often little education) who directly or indirectly (family members) have suffered gross human rights violations such as sexual violence, torture, killings, forced displacement, arbitrary arrest, or detention. While some see their

experience as an essential part of their identity, others identify more strongly with their ethnicity or religion. Thus, mobilizing around concepts of survivorhood is new and not always well understood. Women from different ethnic backgrounds share their experiences in workshops but fail to understand the common link for future work. Groups organize on the community level (Rohingya women in the refugee camps) or around everyday experiences (female village heads in Karen State<sup>19</sup>) tend to produce more solidarity and understanding.

In post-coup Myanmar, survivorhood has become intangible in a different way. The quasi-total war spreading into almost every corner of the country has resulted in the word “survivor” being used in a much broader sense, encompassing Civil Disobedience Movement members and women human rights defenders (WHRD) forced to go into hiding or flee across the border, LGBTQ+ individuals, entire communities affected by military atrocities, air strikes, etc. Old partners/women’s rights organizations increasingly focusing on basic need provisions might find it challenging to categorize needs by declaring different types of survivorhood, while newly established organizations do not necessarily apply this lens when providing support. Consequently, the survivors of CRSV rarely feature as a specific protracted group unless it is in the framework of the donor organization supporting a particular project. For this reason, many times, when partners speak of/work with survivors, they mean it in this broader sense.

## DOCUMENTATION

AJAR has always approached documentation as being part of a participatory process that incorporates healing and self-care, community building, skill building, advocacy, and livelihood support. This so-called Stone and Flower methodology<sup>20</sup> was shared with AJAR’s partners, particularly ethnic women’s rights organizations who incorporated it in their work with women survivors. The first results of this documentation work appeared in the collection *Opening the Box*,<sup>21</sup> which was followed by another compilation of stories *Speaking Truth for Peace*.<sup>22</sup> A short film entitled *Don’t be afraid, we are with you*<sup>23</sup> was also released. A selection of these stories, mainly from Kachin and Karen, were later included in *Enduring Impunity*, compounding 140 stories of women survivors from the Asia Pacific region.<sup>24</sup> The book first appeared in 2015. In 2021, a storybook focusing on experiences of displaced Kachin women, some of them also violence survivors, was published under the title *A life in between: Kachin women during the conflict*.<sup>25</sup> This book is particularly interesting from a methodological perspective, because COVID-19 restrictions forced AJAR to resort to even more innovation, thus the research and the interviews were primarily conducted by the

women themselves, who interviewed each other and made various recordings. Another innovative work within this project was the production of two animated short films focusing on survivors, created with the purpose of sharing a collective narrative of women survivor experiences in the ethnic areas: *Decades of Conflict from Then 'til Now: The Story of Naw Po and Her Village*<sup>26</sup> follows the trials and tribulations of a Karen woman, while *Survivors Finding One Another: Survivor Support Groups* centers on the healing power of survivor peer support.<sup>27</sup>

In 2019, in response to mass atrocities committed against the Rohingya who were then forced to flee to neighboring Bangladesh, AJAR started focusing on Rohingya living in IDP camps. With a similar approach to Myanmar, AJAR collected women's stories from different camps with the participatory methods of Stone and Flower. Their stories, using art-based storytelling methods (this time embroidering quilts), were collected in a photo book in 2019, entitled *Quilt of Memory and Hope*.<sup>28</sup> Some of the stories were also incorporated into the graphic novel *Quilting for Justice* launched in 2021.<sup>29</sup>

After the coup in 2021, there was a sudden upsurge of human rights documentation. Organizations with little to no previous experience in documentation became interested and new organizations were also established. The primary objective of documentation became evidence gathering to support future transitional justice processes, including submissions to relevant international bodies (IIMM, ICC). Consequently, AJAR has been placing more emphasis on strengthening the capacities of the documentation network ND-Burma and training new partners to potentially contribute to ND Burma's data collection (or just use the system in order to be aligned).

With the growing interest in documentation, circles of who is documenting and what have also expanded. AJAR has tapped into this trend by creating a pilot initiative that supported 23 journalists in 2022 to participate in documentation training, learn about transitional justice, and produce short video essays and long-form reports on transitional justice and human rights, with the idea of steering interest toward survivor stories. AJAR has also sponsored two transitional justice filmmaking competitions.<sup>30</sup> While the scope, along with the definition of "survivor," has largely expanded, experiences of women survivors still play a crucial role, evidenced by the production of the previously mentioned animated documentaries.

## **HEALING WOUNDS : MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVISION/PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT**

Incorporating trauma-sensitivity and community-based psychosocial support has always been part of AJAR's holistic PAR approach. Activities such as Stone and Flower, where survivors can share their burdens and joys with their peers, Memory Box to store happy and painful memories, and Body Mapping to locate pain and joy in their bodies all serve healing purposes in the setting of community

peer support. AJAR has been sharing this methodology with its long-term partners (KWAT, TWO, KWO) in ethnic areas, who use it to document women's stories and also to provide healing. Since its inception, partners have conducted several PAR workshops with the involvement of survivors from across the country. These activities have also been expanded to Bangladesh with the addition of another approximately 90 survivors in different refugee camps using slightly altered methods more relevant for the local context (such as quilting). In 2021, 35 survivors in conflict-prone northern Shan and Kachin states participated in PAR workshops organized by partners; however, with the escalation of the violence and due to security concerns, activities as well as participant numbers have needed to be significantly reduced. The implementation of PAR activities is supported by two manuals produced by AJAR: the original Stone and Flower manual, available in Burmese, as well as the Healing Wounds tool kit, which, in addition to Burmese, is also available in Karen and Kachin languages.

In comparison with AJAR's programs elsewhere in the region, well-being and self-care have received an even more prominent role in recognizing the difference between post-conflict settings and the context of ongoing violations. Nowhere has this been more prominent than in the Healing Wounds project, which has shifted focus to survivor movement building and somewhat away from documentation. Those members of the survivor support group who have been trained as community facilitators are not only introduced to self-care techniques for their own practice but are given basic skills to guide group processes, respond to member needs, and provide peer support. While both the documentation and movement-building approaches have had at their core the well-being and empowerment of women survivors, the focus on documentation presumes to share violations of human rights as a central component. Shifting to a primary goal of movement building could reposition the focus on sharing about human rights abuses as secondary to the focus on positive aspects of healing, empowerment, and collective action as survivors. While the distinction is subtle, the intention of the perspective shift is to establish the groundwork for long-term collective action and support.

After the coup, public interest in mental health has grown significantly and so has AJAR's investment in it. The work continues with the shift to not only supporting the well-being of the survivors, but also of those working with them. Within this framework, AJAR organized its own stress management and self-care trainings for its partners in 2021, and in 2022, it also partnered with other organizations with a long history of providing mental health support for political prisoners and other survivors. These workshops were followed by a longer CSS training in 2023 that aims to build up skills of partner organization staff to provide basic counselling for members of their communities. These activities are also supported by the creation and dissemination of Burmese language self-care tools including videos and the establishment of a Facebook page with relevant materials. In addition, AJAR has also supported partners in their own production of self-care materials, including podcasts and a video series.

## RESPONDING TO URGENT NEEDS

AJAR recognizes the importance of basic needs for the survivors when they are far away from the right to justice. AJAR has put a lot of emphasis on building peer support networks that not only serve healing and potentially advocacy purposes but also provide the basis of sustainable livelihood initiatives. The establishment of these groups in the Myanmar context has proven difficult due to working with partners who are located in different parts of the country and cover vast areas. For this reason, supporting survivors has initially taken the form of contributions to individual initiatives.

A so-called **Urgent Emergency Fund** was set up and managed by AJAR's partners who, through an application process, allocated funds to survivors in need. These funds were used to establish small businesses, most of which were discontinued after a while. The UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture also supported the fund. Partners worked with a broader concept of survivorhood, which did not always lend itself to a clear distinction of who a "worthy" recipient is, which, therefore led to the closure of the fund.

The Healing Wounds project attempted to address these shortcomings and focused more on collective livelihood. AJAR successfully worked with a partner and the first women survivor support group in Kachin State to create preferable conditions for a safe and dignified resettlement of IDP women. This included training in **income-generating skills** (e.g., plastic basket weaving, soap making) and the earth-building workshop, all integrated into a holistic approach to community-building and well-being support. COVID-19 and the subsequent coup and security restrictions, however, cut these activities as well as the project short.

At the same time, responding to basic needs has gotten even more prominent, and most women's organizations AJAR partners with have shifted resources toward humanitarian support that does not target a specific group, but entire communities affected by conflict. Some partners continue to provide skill-building training (shampoo making, slipper sewing, food preparations) for women survivors after the coup to respond to worsening economic conditions. Others focus more on emergency support for political prisoners and women human rights defenders. With the breakdown of many government structures, diminished trust in institutions, and limited or no access to many essential services, these interventions are more important than ever. While the primary objective is sustainability, emergency support can respond to the most urgent health care, safety, and livelihood needs of women survivors living in increasingly challenging circumstances.

## ADVOCATING FOR RECOGNITION AND JUSTICE

As part of AJAR's holistic approach, documentation conducted in the PAR processes was always intended for advocacy purposes. Advocacy work has, however, been pursued on different levels that are not always connected. Survivor documentation has primarily been used to raise awareness in the direct communities of those affected and

internal advocacy within the partner organizations themselves. In some instances, women's organizations have involved the survivors in larger advocacy efforts. KWO nominates survivors to Women's League of Burma meetings, while KWAT has invited them to relevant sessions of the state parliament in Kachin. These examples are, however, relatively rare, given the many barriers (language, class, education, gender) women survivors have to overcome. Again, the Healing Wounds project attempted to bridge this gap, and those members of the survivor support group trained to be community facilitators "went from accepting everything, in the beginning, to eventually asking lots of questions and suggesting training topics that met their needs." As they built their confidence and awareness of rights and social issues, they began to take more ownership over the process of their learning, and of the group itself. Nevertheless, much of the higher-level representation still lies with partner organizations and AJAR itself.

During the previous government, these efforts were primarily directed at the previously mentioned Reparations Working Group, a civil society initiative to work on the draft of a reparations policy for the incumbent government. Unfortunately, the work of the group was suspended after the coup. AJAR still tried to use both its domestic and international networks to advocate for strategies that address the situation of women survivors through supporting joint strategy meetings among women's organizations and keeping international donor organizations informed about needs on the ground.

The coup has had far-reaching effects in this arena as well, resulting in severe restrictions and also creating new opportunities. In the post-coup environment, there is an ever-growing interest on the side of the resistance movement in transitional justice mechanisms, with the main area of focus being criminal accountability and potential prosecution of those responsible for the violations. The establishment of the NUCC's Joint Coordination Committee on Transitional Justice and the Transitional Justice Alliance is a clear indicator of this growing interest and provides new channels of engagement for potential policy change. As one of the leading voices on the topic in the country, AJAR responded in late 2022 with the launch of the Justice Resource Center<sup>31</sup> website along with the TJ in Burma Facebook page to be a repository of relevant resources and also to highlight other key components of transitional justice processes and advocate for the inclusion and consideration of survivors. In an ongoing process, the website continues to collect, organize, and upload materials in Burmese and other ethnic languages to aid women who seek to affect change in their communities regarding human rights, truth, justice, reparations, and reform.

In addition to its advocacy efforts, AJAR continues to support initiatives of old and new partners raising awareness of the plight of survivors (particularly women survivors) as part of their transitional justice framework. These initiatives include, for instance, "Speak Truth to Power" advocacy campaign that raises public awareness on survivor issues and educates the public on how to handle disclosures and support survivors. A group of selected journalists who received prior training on human rights documentation issues were also supported to publish stories from the perspectives of women and members of the LGBT community. Partners also organized



a variety of events on major human rights days, including a survivor gathering in Kachin on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict with the participation IDPs from the entire state.

At the same time, although all AJAR partners agree that there is increasing violence against women due to the conflict, reporting has been diminishing because of the lack of trust in institutions, the lack of due procedure in reported cases, and potentially damaging consequences for those who report violations. Another complication is, in the current setting, CRSV manifests itself in forms beyond its narrow definition, represented by the significant increase in domestic violence cases. Partners have recognized this and are trying to respond, but reporting of such cases is even more scarce, a fact that is only aggravated by the fact that many organizations have been forced to close safe houses and shelters due to the volatile security situation. In general, partners working more closely with communities declared advocacy work to be a lesser priority as opposed to the provision of basic needs and humanitarian support.

## Lessons, Reflections, and Recommendations

### REFLECTIONS ON SURVIVOR WORK IN MYANMAR

**Who is a survivor?** There are many dynamics and discussions around who is considered a survivor. Due to the normalization of conflict and ongoing human rights violations, as well as solid stigmatization surrounding sexual violence, the nature of violations is often not disclosed. Some NGOs have focused almost solely on direct victims of physical or sexual violence or the spouses of direct victims, but in reality, the circle of victims/survivors is much broader, and those most affected are not necessarily the most vocal about their experiences. Consequently, other NGOs have recognized that broadening the understanding of who can be considered (e.g., anyone living in an IDP camp) can ultimately include all survivors and their diverse needs (including survivors of CRSV, who would not otherwise disclose their experiences). This broadening of scope continues after the coup and is reflected in NGOs', including AJAR's, approach to survivorhood. It can also potentially support breaking down the barriers that exist between the employees of organizations (who are themselves often survivors) and the rural survivors they support and contribute to the creation of a survivor identity as a source of solidarity and strength.

**Building trust:** With decades-long conflict that hinges on ethno-religious identities, creating solidarity among survivors from different groups has always been challenging. Seeing beyond one's grievances and building support across these boundaries has always been one of the primary motivators behind AJAR's work. Challenging mistrust stemming from isolation and lack of meaningful exchange was what brought the survivor gatherings to life. They were, however, difficult to maintain across large distances following a breakdown in security and communication. This mistrust stems from similar dynamics on a smaller, more localized scale, existing between communities and organizations working for and with them, as well as within the communities themselves. Some organizations have been struggling with (re)establishing trust with local communities and have had to shift priorities to answer the most urgent needs (e.g., livelihood instead of advocacy, more care than documentation) to achieve that goal.

The ultimate goal of establishing local support groups has also proved harder to achieve than anticipated due to the reasons explained above. Nevertheless, the example of Kachin shows that a holistic approach on a local level that includes trust building as its key component can go a long way in providing the basis of a broader network of survivor solidarity.

**Balancing documentation with care:** AJAR's participatory action research approach, as its name suggests, places a significant emphasis on research, meaning on documentation of conflict-related violations, primarily affecting women. However, due to barriers to disclosure and discussion around survivorhood, AJAR, particularly in the Healing Wounds project, has given more attention to sharing and healing as a prerequisite to further engagement. Recognizing that survivors of CRSV and other violations are trauma survivors is essential, and this awareness has to be integrated throughout the project in the form of trust building, self-care, and peer support to avoid an exploitative process. It must also be carried over into documentation support provided for other partners training with and/or advised by AJAR. Collecting and publishing stories of survivors can contribute to a better understanding of their situation and enhance transitional justice processes, but it needs to be done with care and sensitivity to the experiences of those willing to share, as well as with a careful management of expectations and risks of what such disclosure can potentially mean.

**Livelihood over advocacy?** One of the ultimate aims of survivor support work is societal and legal recognition as well as subsequent reparations and compensations. However, in the context of the inaccessibility and unreliability of state services and the general diminishment of government structures, those changes might not be coming for a long time. On the one side, the military SAC government has no legitimacy and competence in the eyes of the population, and on the other side, the NUG/NUCC, thought it might possess the will, lacks the resources and means to implement it. Providing livelihood support to survivors to account for such gaps has been a cornerstone of AJAR's holistic approach to survivor work. As opposed to simple cash handouts and grants for small businesses, finding sustainable ways through skill training for income-generating activities and other household support (earth building) has proven more effective. Such skill-building combined with the idea of collective livelihood that rests upon support group structures is a meaningful approach to continue. However, given the increasingly challenging circumstances, the partners' realization and shift toward emergency response needs to be considered and integrated. Although some partners have expressed a need to deprioritize advocacy in favor of basic needs support, it does not mean that advocacy efforts aren't important. The key is coordinating those parallel efforts, ensuring that experiences and voices from the ground feed into policymaking processes.

## ENABLING/SUPPORTING FACTORS

**Partnership:** As the Healing Wounds project shows how strengthening survivor groups and potential movement-building rests on strong partnership among AJAR, partner organizations, as well as individual survivors, fostering power-sharing, transparency, and collective leadership practices are especially important, although challenging, in an environment of growing mistrust, isolation, and a tendency to resort to top-down decision-making. Instead of simply distributing grants to partners, an ongoing commitment from AJAR to maintain these structures is vital to empowering partners and survivors. By acting as technical advisors and providing space for connection, survivors can build their capacities further to support themselves and their communities.

**Increased interest in transitional justice and documentation:** If the military coup brought anything that can be considered a positive outcome, it must be the increased interest in human rights documentation. Many new actors have come forward, and older actors have also developed documentation initiatives. This has provided AJAR with an opportunity not only to act as technical support but also to advocate for the importance of documenting the stories of victims/survivors. Even on the level of policy discussions, the topic of transitional justice is receiving more traction. Attention, however, is mainly focused on high-level legal processes (e.g., preparing prosecutions of the high-ranking military); thus, AJAR has a vital role in including and promoting a survivor-centered approach, ensuring that the needs and voices of survivors find their way into these discussions. Documentation training with a wide range of actors, including journalists, awareness-raising campaigns such as the transitional justice documentary film competition, and establishing the Justice Resource Center, are all steps in this direction.

## INHIBITING FACTORS

**Trust, security:** Building trust among survivors has always been a cornerstone of creating a broader movement. Already a challenging feat before the coup, this task has gotten more difficult under current conditions. Previous divides along ethnic religious lines have fragmented further according to affiliations with the CDM movement, the parallel government, and the PDFs. Bridging these differences is quite challenging due to security concerns on the ground that hinder people from gathering, as well as restrictions in online settings. It is also exacerbated by an environment of what could be called continuous traumatic stress that contributes to acting-out behaviors most acutely observed in the social media landscape. These conditions seriously limit traditional project work in the country and can become an obstacle to widening the network beyond already established partners and including new survivors.

**Ongoing violations:** As opposed to some other contexts, where the conflict that led to violations has at least partially ended, in Myanmar, even before the coup, most survivors had been living in an environment of continuous conflict and ongoing violations. This has led to various difficulties in disclosure: general normalization of violence in certain areas, severe stigmatization, particularly around sexual violence, distrust in institutions run by the SAC government, and “betrayal.” In addition to these obstacles, creating a safe space under these conditions is also challenging. Partners have voiced concern that, although cases of sexual violence have more than likely increased, disclosure has become extremely rare. Consequently, focus must be placed on inner safety, resilience, and building support structures instead of unearthing trauma. Having a broader concept of survivorhood also helps people benefit from support without forcing them to disclose potentially (re)traumatizing details.

**Power dynamics:** As discussed, constituting survivorhood has been a contested topic, often with strong differentiations based on class, education, and economic status. These dynamics between “passive” recipients of support and those supporting (partner organizations) persist, even with the general widening of who is now called a “survivor.” On the level of advocacy and policymaking, addressing sexual violence, particularly CRSV, is banished into the domain of other “women’s issues”; they are considered “second day” (not a priority), and AJAR faces a key challenge in negotiating its positions between implementing a project partner and a donor organization.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Promote Holistic Approaches to Survivor Support That Include (Collective) Livelihood:**

Previous experiences have shown that incorporating some form of basic needs and livelihood support for survivors is essential, especially as victims/survivors tend to be further marginalized through their victimization. However, this support must take a form that offers long-term solutions for the survivors, fostering self-reliance and building on existing skills. At best, it is organized around a peer-support network of survivors that also serves other purposes (for instance, well-being support).

### **Incorporate Well-Being as a Cross-Cutting Element of Any Project/Program Design:**

Well-being and psychosocial support service provision are essential to survivor work. They cannot, however, only be conceptualized as discreet entities in the broader survivor support framework manifested solely in the form of individual counselling or well-being workshops. AJAR's previous experiences have shown that on the level of activities, art-based approaches and strengthening peer support rooted in the local context and experiences are potentially more fitting and sustainable. Trauma sensitivity must also be considered at every program design stage, from conceptualization through implementation to evaluation. This might also mean that certain activities must be de-prioritized for a time (documentation of individual histories of violations) to avoid re-traumatization.

**Widen Conceptualization of Survivorhood:** Given the social and legal constraints and difficulties around disclosure of experiences of sexual violence, allowing for a broader conceptualization of survivorhood (e.g., conflict survivors) has the potential to reach survivors of CRSV who otherwise would be barred from accessing support.

**Promote Survivor-Centred Approaches in Policy Discussions:** Interest in transitional justice mechanisms provides an opportunity to advocate for survivor support. However, primary attention at higher levels of policymaking is often directed (at least in the current context of Myanmar) at documentation for accountability purposes and in preparation for future legal processes. Using the transitional justice approach to shift focus to reparation policies can help center attention on survivors of CRSV and create interim policies even in the context of ongoing conflict/violations.

### **Foster Relationship Building among Survivors across Ethnic and Religious Affiliations:**

Building a peer support network among survivors is key to future movement building. This network building, however, needs to happen on different levels. Supporting exchanges beyond local communities of survivors can create a stronger foundation for future nationwide advocacy and help empower survivors to mobilize for action.

### **Work Actively to Dismantle Unequal Power Structures in All Levels of Partnerships:**

Distinctions between passive recipients of support and organizations providing said support need to be challenged. Starting survivor support work from the ground, ensuring that survivors meaningfully participate at every stage of project design, is essential for creating solutions that address real needs, fostering individual and community well-being, and building a movement capable of challenging unequal power structures on a broader societal scale.

## Endnotes

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- 12 KWAT/AJAR Seeking Justice report, 2020; AJAR/WLB Access to Justice paper, 2016.
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- 15 A/HRC/45/5
- 16 <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/sexual-violence-in-the-fog-of-war/>
- 17 ICJ 2018 Myanmar Report
- 18 <https://nd-burma.org/you-cannot-ignore-us-vic-tims-of-human-rights-violations-in-burma-from-1970-2017-outline-their-desires-for-justice/>.
- 19 Kill Me Instead of Them: [Link](#), and Walking Amongst Sharp Knives [Link](#).
- 20 A publication describing the methodology is available here: [Stone and Flower](#).
- 21 The publication is available here: [Opening the Box](#).
- 22 The publication is available here: [Speaking Truth for Peace](#) The accompanying short film can be seen here: [Link](#).
- 23 The film is available on YouTube: [Don’t be afraid, we are with you](#).
- 24 The entire book is available here: [Enduring Impunity](#).
- 25 The book was never officially launched for security reasons and only circulated in a digital form in certain circles.
- 26 The trailer of the film can be seen on YouTube: [Decades of Conflict from Then ‘til Now: The Story of Naw Po and Her Village](#).
- 27 “The trailer of the film can be found on YouTube: [Survivors Finding One Another: Survivor Support Groups](#).
- 28 The English version of the book is available here: [Quilt of Memory and Hope](#).
- 29 The graphic novel was published in English, Bangla and Burmese: [Quilting for Justice](#).
- 30 A selection of the films is available on AJAR’s YouTube channel: [Link](#).
- 31 <https://justiceresources-mm.com/>.



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