



TAIWAN FOUNDATION  
for DEMOCRACY

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## **Karen Human Rights Group Wins the 2013 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award**

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy announced today that the winner of 2013 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award will be awarded to Karen Human Rights Group. KHRG (Karen Human Rights Group) is a grassroots non-governmental organization that actively operates in southeastern Myanmar. KHRG was established in December 1992 by Mr. Kevin Heppner, a Canadian teacher who began to document human rights violations suffered by Karen civilians after military junta bombed and destroyed the village where he lived. Not only does KHRG record human rights violations, but it also provides affected communities with documentation, resistance and advocacy skills.

KHRG is now based in Thailand. KHRG works directly with villagers who are suffering from forced labor, systematic destruction of villages and crops, forced relocation, arbitrary detention, torture, extortion, summary executions and sexual assault. KHRG becomes one of the few organizations which are capable of systemically documenting these human rights abuses in detail. KHRG has therefore been given or nominated by awards from international organizations for their ongoing human rights protection efforts, for example, in 1995, KHRG won the Peace Fund Canada Honor Award; in 1998, KHRG was nominated for the John Humphrey Freedom Award; in 2000 and 2001, KHRG was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; then in 2001, KHRG won the Canada-based Science for Peace Award.

On July 31, 2009, KHRG reached a crucial milestone by releasing its 400th report since establishment in 1992. To date, KHRG has released 640 reports, covering human rights abuses still occurring during 2013 in

southeastern Myanmar. Topics covered include forced labor, indiscriminate firing of mortars and small arms, and severe landmine contamination. Also, in 2011, KHRG saw notable success in bringing the voices of villagers to an international audience. In July, 2011, KHRG released a report called *Dead Man Walking: Convict Porters on the Front Lines in Eastern Burma* in conjunction with Human Rights Watch. It was, at the same time, the first report that Human Rights Watch has written jointly with a local human rights organization in Myanmar. KHRG supplemented to this report with additional 342 pages of testimony and analysis of interviews with escaped convict porters.

In 2012, KHRG continued to raise the visibility of human rights issues in Myanmar when its representatives traveled to New York to present at a United Nations Security Council consultation meeting. KHRG delegation engaged with members of Security Council to discuss accountability mechanisms as well as prevention relating to the recruitment and the use of child soldiers by armed groups in Myanmar. Later, KHRG testified before the Security Council on child soldier issues. In March 2013, KHRG released another landmark report, documenting issues of land confiscation and forced displacement in eastern Myanmar and how communities were affected by them without being consulted beforehand in terms of compensation. The prolific human rights violations from the government then brought more attention of international communities.

KHRG was chosen after a two-stage reviewing process. The final review panel included Dr. Nisuke Ando, Director of the Kyoto Human Rights Research Institute and former Chair of the United Nations Human Rights Committee; Dr. Alex Boraine, Chairperson of International Center of Transitional Justice and former Deputy Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa; Dr. Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the 2008 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award laureate; Dr. Carolina Hernandez, Professor of Political Science at the University of the Philippines and President of Institute of Strategic and Development Studies, Inc.; Ms Asma Jahangir, Chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; TFD Chairman Wang Jin-Pyng, and Dr.

Teh-Fu Huang, President of the TFD.

KHRG will formally receive the 2013 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award at a ceremony in Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel Taipei on December 10<sup>th</sup>, the International Human Rights Day. The Award consists of one sculpture and a US\$100,000 grant to support KHRG for their ongoing works to promote and protect human rights.

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For more information about the Award, please

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