

Biography of Khin Ohmar

My name is Khin Ohmar. I am a Burmese human rights and democracy activist. I was a senior student at Rangoon Arts and Science University studying chemistry when I first became involved in student protests in March 1988, known as March Affairs. Later I co-founded a student organization called Ma-Ka-Da and involved in organizing the historical General Strike on August 8, 1988, known as the 8888. When the Burmese military brutally cracked down on peaceful protests killing an estimated 3000 demonstrators, I left home for the border areas where ethnic revolutionary organizations take territorial control, defending their ancestral land and heritage from repressive Burmese military. In 1989, I sought refuge from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the United States, and I was granted a political refugee status to resettle in the United States in 1990.

I graduated from Simon's Rock of Bard College in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1995 with Bachelor of Science; did internships at the Human Rights Watch (then-Asia Watch) and AFL-CIO; and later worked as Burma Project Advocacy Coordinator at Refugees International, based in Washington, DC. I actively organized and participated in public advocacy and campaigns for a Free Burma! In 1995, I testified before the US Senate Subcommittee on Foreign Operations giving my account of the fatal crackdowns in 1988 and the violence and oppression that occurred since.

In 1998 I left Refugees International and joined Burmese Women's Union and in 1999, co-founded the Women's League of Burma, an umbrella women organization comprised of 13 women organizations from Burma, and coordinated the WLB's women peacebuilders program. In 2004, I joined Network for Democracy and Development and was elected as chairperson for two terms. NDD co-founded Forum for Democracy in Burma, a coalition which is comprised of activist groups from the 1988 democracy movement, in which I served as the Secretary of Foreign Affairs Committee. In 2006, FDB formed Burma Partnership, a regional Free Burma solidarity and campaign network in collaboration with civil society groups across Asia Pacific region to campaign for a free and democratic Burma. I served as the coordinator of Burma Partnership till 2016 when the BP transcended to Progressive Voice. Progressive Voice is a human rights research and advocacy organization, working to amplify the voices of vulnerable, marginalized, and disenfranchised communities of Burma. We work in partnership with civil society organizations across the country working on a range of issues from human rights protection and humanitarian aid provision to ethnic and religious minority rights, land rights, labor rights and sustainable development. Currently, I serve in Progressive Voice as Chairperson of the Advisory Board.

My focus areas of work for democracy in Burma include leadership building of youth and women; women empowerment and peacebuilding; human rights protection and defending; advocacy and campaign. I have spoken before various regional and international forums including the UN Human Rights Council.

In 1996 I received the Capital Area Peace Maker Award from American University in Washington, DC and Refugee Leader of Promise Award by Women Commission for Refugee Women and Children in New York. In 2008, I was awarded with the Anna Lindh Award, named for assassinated Swedish Foreign which is awarded annually to a woman or young person with "the courage to fight indifference, prejudice, oppression and injustices in order to promote a good life for all people in an environment marked by respect for human rights." In 2008 in the same year, I received Vital Voices Global Leadership Award for Human Rights, which I shared with Ms. Charm Tong from a sister organization, Shan Women's Action Network. In 2018, I was awarded with an International Young Women's Peace Award by Democracy Today in Armenia.