



BURMA LINK NEWSLETTER APRIL 2014

Burma Link Newsletter 1/2014 (covering January – March 2014)

MISSION: Burma Link upholds the voices of the people of Burma and works to empower the people to become agents of change in their own lives

Message from the editor

This is Burma Link's first ever newsletter and we are very excited to have it published! With extremely limited resources, Burma Link has come a long way. We started less than two years ago in humble surroundings in Mae La refugee camp with nothing but a determination and passion to help the people of Burma have their voices heard. We hope that you will enjoy this newsletter and find it a useful source of information as well as a channel to listen to Burma's voices for change. Our aim is to help the people of Burma get their voices out there to the world, to people like you; people who want to help and want to listen. We are just a link between the world and the people of Burma, aiming to bring Burma's voices for change to as large audience as possible. You can help us, we are an all-volunteer organisation!

- Ariana Zarleen

In this newsletter

- QUICK FACTS ABOUT BURMA AND THE BORDER – DID YOU KNOW THIS?
- WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?
- NEW PUBLICATIONS
- LATEST STORIES OF PEOPLE OF BURMA
- GET INVOLVED!

This newsletter covers Burma Link's activities as well as significant developments inside Burma and on the border, new publications, and people's stories during the period between January and early April 2014. The next newsletter is planned for publication in July.

Recent activities

The 2nd AOC Leadership Program successfully completed!

From March 31st to April 4th we completed the second AOC (Agents of Change) Leadership training with six promising young leaders from Burma. The training took place at Wide Horizons (WH) in Mae Sot with six young energetic WH graduates attending the 5-day training.

The AOC program aims at developing essential life and leadership skills like confidence, honesty and courage, responsible citizenship, and the ability to effectively deal with others. During their **Journey toward Empowerment**, the participants also learn how to help their community members value their own voice and have their voices heard.



We believe that cultivating effective local leadership is the determining factor for positive change. AOC Leadership Network is building Burma's first and only self-sustaining leadership network model to empower communities and break the silence, through promoting the sharing of information, stories, and life experiences of communities from Burma locally and around the world.

www.burmalink.org

Quick facts about Burma and the border

DID YOU KNOW?

About Burma:

- The Burma army has **deliberately targeted civilian populations**, described as **genocide of ethnic peoples**.
- Nearly **three million people** have fled Burma and **half a million** remain internally displaced. Most of them belong to ethnic nationality groups.
- Grave **violations of humanitarian law** continue in Burma's prisons and ethnic areas with impunity.
- In Shan and Kachin States Burma army has shelled villages, killed and tortured innocent villagers, carried out **aerial attacks** and **displaced at least 100,000** ethnic people, including Shan, Kachin, Ta'ang (Palaung) and Lahu.

About the border:

- Thailand hosts about **120,000 refugees** in nine official camps on the Thailand-Burma border. The real number of refugees is **at least double**.
- International donors have recently **shifted funds from Thailand-Burma border to central Burma** where funds are funnelled through the Burmese government and are **unable to reach ethnic border areas**.

Because of recent funding cuts on the border:

- Ethnic organisations and peoples are once again being **silenced**.
- Vulnerable populations on both sides of the border now **lack crucial aid**.
- Some refugees in Thailand believe that **they are being starved out** in order to avoid their continuing assistance and future repatriation. Many feel forced to return with little hope of a brighter future.
- For many people of Burma, **THE ONLY CHANGE** due to the recent reforms is **exclusion** and **growing fear and uncertainty** amidst reduced aid and rumours of forced repatriation.



Karen Revolution Day was celebrated on January 31st

What's happening now?

• Land confiscation

Increasing land confiscation by Burmese military government, especially in Karen State

• Population census

UN-funded census continues despite lack of consultation with ethnic nationalities and failure to comply with international standards

• Violence and unrest in Arakan State

Extreme monks continue to spread hate speech, Rohingya taken out of census, attacks on aid agencies helping Rohingya

• Ceasefire negotiations

Described by some as negotiated surrender, ceasefire negotiations continue whilst political goals of the ethnic people remain unaddressed and Burma Army increases reach in ethnic lands

• Talks of repatriation spur refugee fears

Refugees are increasingly anxious as rations are reduced and profiling survey about repatriation continues

• Armed conflict in Kachin and Shan State

Burma Army continues attacks in northern Burma with lots of severe human rights violations including killings and torture by state actors



Mae La Photo Gallery

Mae La is the largest of the camps on the Thailand-Burma border with 43,000 refugees

New publications

Multimedia

Documentary by **Karen National Development Organization (KNDO)**
Karen Revolution Day: Vision and Unity (February 2014)

Photo Gallery by **Burma Link**: **Gallery of Mae La Refugee Camp**
(February 2014)

Reports

The Border Consortium (TBC): **Programme Report** July-December 2013. (March 2014)

ND-Burma: **Human Rights Situation in Burma**. July-December 2013.
(February 2014)

Women's League of Burma (WLB): **Same Impunity, Same Pattern**:

Sexual abuses by the Burma Army will not stop until there is a genuine civilian government. (January 2014)

LATEST STORIES OF THE PEOPLE OF BURMA

Back Pack Jungle Medics Treating IDPs in Burma's Conflict Zones: Interview with Saw Win Kyaw



The Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) is a multi-ethnic community-based organisation that has been providing primary healthcare in the conflict and rural areas of Burma for over 15 years. While BPHWT's health workers continue to risk their lives in providing primary health care for Burma's most vulnerable people, one of the most significant challenges they have recently had to tackle is that **donors are increasingly abandoning the border**. In this in-depth interview, Saw Win Kyaw, the Director of the BPHWT, talks about the BPHWT's activities, the recent convergence plans, their dreams and goals, fears and roadblocks, as well as the challenges and difficulties faced by jungle medics in Burma's conflict zones.

"... Currently, most donors are moving to Yangon. And we are most or all of the cross-border aid. So they have moved to Yangon and they are not taking care of the real vulnerable persons. The budget here is very, very much less and not enough for our estimated budget plan. We are not sure what to cut down... Our working areas are very remote areas and also most of our working areas are ethnic areas. So if the government or any NGO sends help through Yangon, they are very far away and then they also send their own staff there. One big barrier for that is lack of trust and common language. We have experience for more than ten years so we know how to deal with the communities and how to develop health in our areas. **International donors should provide for the community based health system**. Not directly come and provide their own system..." [Read full story on the website.](#)

Story of a Jungle Medic and Ethnic Health Director: Saw Win Kyaw



Saw Win Kyaw is a jungle medic and an ethnic health director who has dedicated his life to bringing primary health care to some of the most vulnerable people of Burma. Saw Win Kyaw established and ran a bamboo clinic in war-torn Papun area in the Karen State for over ten years, amputating more than 150 limbs, delivering babies in emergency conditions with no experience, and training hundreds of others in an attempt to promote a community-based health system in an area where health services were completely destroyed. From Burmese army attacks to the threat of landmines and malaria, for Saw Win Kyaw and other jungle medics, these are nothing but 'normal conditions'. In 1998, Saw Win Kyaw joined the Back Pack Health Worker Team and is now the director of the organisation, managing over 300 health workers across rural ethnic areas in Burma. This is his story.

"...In 1997, the military government burned down our clinic. Not only my clinic, they burnt the whole village and also the Toe They Del clinic, which is supported by Dr. Cynthia Maung. The villagers knew that if the military troops come they need to flee to the jungle. So the troops arrived in the village and they burnt down the village. Then they also came to our clinic and they burnt it down. We knew they were coming. We fled together with six landmine injury patients. We had to carry them. We were far away but we saw the clinic burning..."

[Read full story on the website.](#)

'I want peace, I really want it to be true'



Noe Myint is a Karen soldier with a big heart and a big dream for his people. He has fought for revolution for over 20 years while also looking after three of his own children as well as eight orphans who had no one else to turn to.

"My father was a KNU soldier. I couldn't go to school properly because my father was a soldier and we had to leave the village often. I only went to school for two years... Sometimes I had to follow my parents to the jungle. We had to stay in the jungle hiding from the Burmese military... I was young when I was in the village so I don't remember much of that time. But I saw Burma Army soldiers come to the village to catch porters. I saw them torturing people... At the time we didn't know about Thailand or the border or a place to get away from the Burmese military..." [Read full story on the website.](#)

"Our staff had never experienced how to do amputation"

"The donors should understand that they need to continue to provide cross-border aid"

- Saw Win Kyaw (Jungle medic and Director of Back Pack Health Worker Team)

STORIES OF THE PEOPLE OF BURMA - CONTINUES



Rakhaing Leader of the Guerrilla and the Peaceful Pro-Democracy Movement: Saw Mra Raza Linn

Saw Mra Raza Linn is the founder and Chairperson of Rakhaing Women's Union and a founding member of Women's League of Burma. During the democracy uprising in Burma in 1988, Mra Raza Linn led thousands of people in pro-democracy marches in her native Rakhaing State. She conducted nonviolent protests against local government officials and travelled extensively to promote the inclusion of diverse religious groups in Burma's democracy movement. Mra Raza Linn also worked hard to address ongoing violence against women and to release many local political prisoners from jail. When Martial Law was declared in Burma in September 1988, the government ordered the capture of Mra Raza Linn and like many other prominent democracy leaders, she was forced to flee the country. Mra Raza Linn fled to the deep jungles of Bangladesh, where she soon became a leader of the armed guerrilla struggle, before resuming her political activism on behalf of Rakhaing women and children. Mra Raza Linn continues to work for national reconciliation, peace and for advancing women's participation in all spheres of decision making level for establishing a democratic and peaceful country.

*"In 1988 I was one of the active leaders of the democracy movement in the Rakhaing [Arakan] State. At that time I was a teacher. So I organized many people and delivered my first democracy speech at Wangabar Ground in Sittwe on 9th of August, 1988... On 21st of August we seized all government offices in my native town, Rathedaung, without any bloodshed. The government was angry and wanted to kill me. In 1988, September 18, they seized state power. At that time I was at Rathedaung, running the office and controlling my township. After they seized state power, many gun men came in the township and then they searched for me to kill me. They shouted: *I want to kill Mra Raza Linn, putting the gun through her mouth!* Something like that. They were shouting everywhere..." [Read full story on Burma Link's website.](#)*

"Aww what happened to our life... The youngest one became a guerrilla woman." - Mra Raza Linn

Why we uphold the voices of the people of Burma?

In order for Burma to transform to a peaceful and democratic society based on freedom and justice, the voices of the people of Burma, including the myriad organisations and people in exile, must be heard in the process. Democracy is all about people's voices, and the best way to measure the extent of reforms and progress is to listen to the people, particularly the vulnerable ethnic communities in Burma's border areas. Having access to people's voices and stories fosters greater understanding and knowledge about the past and the present as well as the similarities and differences between Burma's peoples. Sharing information and stories with both local and global communities can promote positive developments and effective action, accountability and justice as well as forgiveness and reconciliation. Storytelling can also be a healing and empowering activity that can help the people of Burma discover themselves and create a shared vision for the future.

"A small group of thoughtful individuals can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

– Margaret Mead

We are an all-volunteer organisation and you can get involved!

- ☐ Donate!
- ☐ Become a member!
- ☐ Become a volunteer!
- ☐ Spread the word!

**BURMA
LINK**

Burma Link
Voices for Change.

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