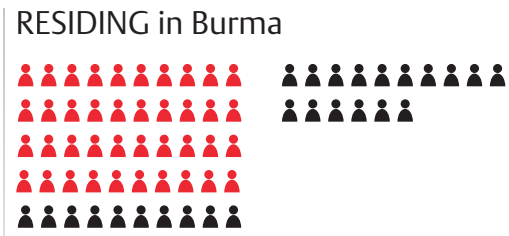




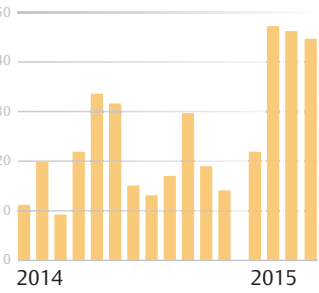
INTERNAL CONFLICT IN BURMA

The Time is **NOT RIGHT**
for Thailand-Burma Border Refugee Return

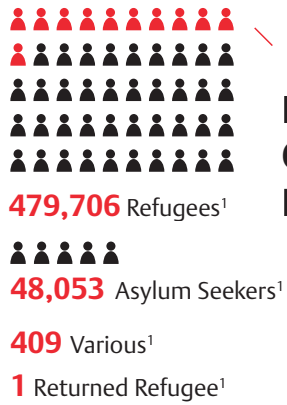
THE MAIN GROUPS OF PEOPLE OF CONCERN



400,000
IDPs IN SOUTH-EAST



ORIGINATING from Burma



110,637
REFUGEES IN 9 CAMPS
ON THE THAILAND-BURMA
BORDER³

1 2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile - Myanmar
www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4877d6.html

2 The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/myanmar/

3 The Border Consortium
www.theborderconsortium.org/media/59439/2015-03-mar-map-tbcunhcr.pdf

4 Myanmar Peace Monitor
www.mmpeacemonitor.org/research/monitoring-archive



The Longest Running Civil War in the World

much-touted nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). and Burma is still far from achieving the signing of the and regularly breached, political dialogue is yet to begin, ment to peace. Initial ceasefires have proven to be fragile have also called into question the government's commit- Burma and increasing militarization in ceasefire areas return. Meanwhile, large scale offensives in northern within reach, fueling the discussion of refugee 2012, has given a misleading image that peace is Army and the Karen National Union (KNU) in January group. The initial ceasefire signed between the Burma bouring Thailand. Most of them belong to Karen ethnic- Burma, and hundreds of thousands have fled to neigh- Some of the fiercest conflict has taken place in eastern

few displaced people have spontaneously returned home. Burma. Despite Burma's opening up in recent years, very 600,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in the Thailand-Burma border camps and more than There are currently over 110,000 refugees residing in to observe a "backsliding" in the reform process. Special Rapporteur on human rights situation in Burma reform, the process is increasingly rocky, leading to the prevailing narrative is that Burma has set off on a road to abuse its own people in a culture of impunity. While the world and a brutal, powerful military that continues to Burma is home to the longest-running civil war in the

Background



Stand in solidarity with

Burma's refugees along the Thailand-Burma border

Calling for all parties to uphold the voices and rights of the refugees

#WorldRefugeeDay, June 20, 2015

www.burmalink.org

The timing is not right for refugee return.

If refugees' concerns are unresolved and the pre-conditions for sustainable return are not ensured, the refugees will again be caught in a cycle of conflict and displacement, only to end up as IDPs upon their return.

Refugee return must be truly voluntary and based on durable solutions that are in line with international human rights standards and humanitarian laws that ensure their safety and dignity. The timing for refugee return will not be right until the conditions which have led the refugees to flee Burma over the past 30 years are resolved. If Burma hopes to achieve a genuine sustainable peace, it is essential that the voices of refugees are heard and their rights are recognized and respected.

The relapse of progress in building a sustainable, democratic country deeply affects Burma's refugees who worry about having to return to their homeland. In the camps, reductions in aid coupled with restrictions in movement are now threatening refugees' livelihoods, potentially leading to a form of constructive refoulment.

"In the light of the current fragile peace process and the unfavorable situation on the ground in Burma, any repatriation taking place under the current circumstance is likely to lead to involuntary return, either directly or indirectly through cutting off aid."

Ariana Zarleen, the Co-founder and current Program Director of Burma Link

www.burmalink.org



"Repatriation should be a refugee-led voluntary operation since they are the primary stakeholders, and not enforced by actions and factors determined by others. Meaningful and inclusive participation of refugees in the decision making of the return process is the key to their sustainable return, and refugees should be provided ample space and time to make their decision regarding their future."

Soe Aung, Working Group member of Burma Partnership and Foreign Affairs Secretary of Forum for Democracy in Burma

www.burmapartnership.org

See Karen Women Organisation's statement on June 20 2015 for recommendations to the Burma Government international governments, the UNHCR, and all relevant parties.



"We always had to run away. I could not go to school, and my heart was always filled with fears." 2

"As soon as we got out, our houses were burned." 1

Majority of the refugees residing in refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border were forced to abandon their homes and villages due to direct or indirect consequences of conflict in ethnic areas. Some fled in fear after family members were killed, served as porters, tortured, and/or raped during conflict and many relocated as a result of the Burma Army decimating their homes and villages.

VOICES OF REFUGEES

WHAT ELSE DO THE REFUGEES SAY?

"The refugees are not included in the decision-making process" 7

"I don't believe any information from the camp" 2

"I have one question to them (UNHCR and the authorities) is the future is in our own hands or is the future is in your hands? To my understanding, our future must be in our own hands so that we can use our capabilities to achieve something we dream about." 5

1 Karen female in Mae La, interviewed in January 2015
2 Karenni male in Ban Mai Nai Soi, interviewed in March 2015
3 Karen male in Mae La, interviewed in February 2015
4 Karen male in Mae La, interviewed in February 2015
5 Karenni male in Mae La Oon, interviewed in February 2015
6 Shan/Karenni female in Mae La, interviewed in January 2015
7 Karenni male in Ban Mai Nai Soi, interviewed in March 2015

"There is still conflict with the ethnic groups. Especially in Kachin State, they are sending a lot of troops I heard. [...] Their (Burma Army's) strategy is fighting the groups one by one. In my opinion, after the Kachin, I'm not so sure if they will attack the Karen. I'm not so sure. You can consider it you know [...] I don't think Burma has changed." 3

War still rages on in northern Burma, and sustainable peace is yet nowhere in sight.

Ongoing Conflict

"On the way we walked, we had to be afraid of the landmines. We just followed other people. I came with about 30 people. Some stepped on the landmine and died. I saw two boys and one girl who stepped on a landmine and died. We walked with fear and we could go through the forest and we got to the border. We can say that we were so lucky at the time." 1

One Karen refugee arrived to Mae La camp in 2010 after her village was burnt and she had witnessed fellow villagers being killed by the Burma Army, including a pregnant woman. She describes her journey from Burma to Thailand:

Fears of forced repatriation

There is a rising concern within the refugee community that the situation on the ground indicates a direction towards premature repatriation.

"We will be in a lot of trouble when the camp is shut down [...] going back to Burma would be a disaster for us." 5

"Oh my... the government, the citizens, the country themselves are not stable and not making any progresses so why repatriate us?? I am wondering whether they are trying to kill us? Yes, I'm very much worried about the repatriation plan!" 6

For more voices and information, read the briefing paper by Burma Partnership and Burma Link: Voices of Refugees - situation of Burma refugees along the Thailand-Burma border.