

# Burma Link Annual Report 2016



**BURMA  
LINK**

Produced by Burma Link

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*“A small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”*

*- Margaret Mead*

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**Burma Link**  
***Voices for Change.***

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*Burma Link is an information sharing organisation that advocates for the rights of Burma's marginalised ethnic nationalities and displaced conflict-affected communities, and amplifies their voices and stories locally and internationally.*

# Summary

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Burma Link is a growing non-profit organisation that was set up in August 2012 to address vital unmet needs affecting Burma's ethnic nationalities and displaced people. Although the ethnic plight plays a central role in the lack of freedom, peace, and democracy in Burma, ethnic voices have been increasingly silenced since 2011 as the world has turned its attention towards central Burma. Burma Link works to ensure that the voices of Burma's ethnic nationalities and displaced people as well as the diverse Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and groups that represent them are heard in Burma's reform process. We work in cooperation with numerous ethnic, capacity building, human rights, media, as well as armed and political organisations that represent various ethnicities from Burma.

## History and Introduction

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This report describes the activities and key achievements of Burma Link during the year 2016.

Burma Link is a legally registered non-profit non-governmental organisation made up of people from Burma and around the world. We come from various cultural and professional backgrounds, some of us refugees on the Thailand-Burma border and others born and educated in Western societies. We all believe that at this critical time of change in Burma, upholding the voices of Burma's marginalised ethnic nationalities and displaced people is more important than ever.

Burma Link was founded by foreign specialists in the field of ethnic and international relations together with refugees from Burma in August 2012 in Mae La refugee camp, Thailand.

As Burma Link's work is focused on highly sensitive issues such as amplifying the voices of organisations that include both unlawful associations in Burma and refugees in the camps in Thailand, it has not been possible to register Burma Link in Burma or in Thailand. Burma Link was legally registered as a non-profit organisation in Finland on August 29, 2013 (reg.no. 210.930).

As part of our ongoing project, we publish [life stories](#) and [in depth interviews](#) with a wide variety of civil society actors as well as soldiers and leaders from different Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) that work towards a Federal Union of Burma. In March 2016, we published a book of life stories, [“Lives on the Line: Voices for Change from the Thailand-Burma Border,”](#) after successfully raising the funds for the project through an online crowdfunding platform. The book brings stories of Burma's ethnic nationalities from the border area to local and international audiences in Burmese and English.

Burma Link continues to advocate for all parties to uphold and respect the voices and rights of Burma's displaced ethnic populations. In 2016, we collaborated with the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) and Burma Partnership to produce a report, [“Invisible Lives: The Untold Story](#)



## 2016 Key Events

### September

Burma Link starts to work on refugee youth documentary in collaboration with the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG) and Karen Youth Organisation.

### September

Burma Link participates in the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Consultation (APRR6) in Bangkok and facilitates KSNG's active participation.

### August

Burma Link, Human Rights Foundation of Monland and Burma Partnership launch the Mon IDP report "Invisible Lives" in Rangoon and Moulmein.

### June

On the World Refugee Day (June 20), Burma Link and Burma Partnership publish short animation "From Refugees to IDPs" online.

### March

Burma Link launches the book "Lives on the Line" to be sold in English online and on the border as well as in Burmese in book shops across Burma.

### February to April

Burma Link conducts interviews with 60 interviewees for the Mon IDP report in the NMSP and Government-controlled areas of Southeast Burma.

[of Displacement Cycle in Burma,](#)" bringing attention to the plight of Mon IDPs. The report was launched in a press conference in Yangon and Moulmein in August 2016 and it was widely featured in international and local media. To mark the World Refugee Day held on June 20<sup>th</sup>, we also published an animation in [English](#) and [Burmese](#) summarising the situation of the Mon IDPs.

In September 2016, we started working on a full feature documentary film in collaboration with two youth organisations, Karen Student Network Group and Karen Youth Organisation. "Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow's Hope: Raising the Voices of Forgotten Youth" amplifies the voices of ethnic refugee youth who live on the Thailand-Burma border, highlighting their calls for inclusion in political processes and recognition of refugee education certificates. The documentary was launched in a press conference in Yangon, Burma, on 22 February, 2017. The [English](#) and [Burmese](#) versions were launched online on March 9, 2016.

Burma Link operates with international and local volunteers and interns, all of whom are deeply committed to our Vision, Mission and Values. In addition, a Governing Board made up of four local and international professionals representing Burma Link's members provides overall sanctioning of Burma Link's operation.

Ever since founding the organisation, Burma Link has utilised a host of contacts on the Thailand-Burma border and across the world, including pro-democracy, capacity building, human rights, youth and women's organisations, EAOs and ethnic service providers, human rights advocates and local community leaders from various ethnic backgrounds as well as international aid workers, journalists, and photographers. Burma Link firmly believes that cooperation is the key to create a shared view of positive change in Burma and to work effectively towards it.

## Background

Burma has experienced one of the biggest humanitarian crisis and most protracted refugee situations in the world. Millions of people from Burma, mostly ethnic nationalities in the country's borderlands, have fled armed conflicts and Burmese military run war crimes and human rights abuses that have spanned over several decades. Despite recent changes in Burma's political landscape, abuse continues in ethnic areas.

The civil war that started with the Karen armed resistance in 1949, following a failure to reach a political agreement, has been dubbed as

the longest ongoing internal conflict in the world. The Burma Army, in order to defeat ethnic armed opposition, has targeted their military campaigns against ethnic civilians. The result has been ongoing persecution of ethnic villagers and destruction of more than 3,500 ethnic villages. As the government has exerted repressive military control over the resource rich ethnic borderlands all over the country, ethnic armies have fought to protect their lands and their people, and ethnic civilians have suffered the consequences.

The voices of Burma's ethnic nationalities have been silenced and suppressed for decades, and largely remain unheard inside Burma. The country's education system promotes the government's views and discourages critical thinking. Few have developed an understanding of the reasons for the conflict and its human consequences, and many have adopted the military-pushed view that ethnic armies are waging a war to tear the country apart. Meanwhile, ethnic nationalities have endured killings, beatings, torture, forced labour, forced relocations, and the use of rape as a weapon of war, all committed in a culture of impunity.

The recent changes in Burma's political landscape and ceasefires signed between the Burma Army and some prominent ethnic resistance groups have given a misleading image that peace is within reach. Meanwhile, large scale offensives in northern Burma and increasing militarisation in ceasefire areas continue. Initial ceasefires have proven to be fragile and regularly breached and inclusive political dialogue is yet to begin. Despite a handful of groups signing the so-called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in November 2015, Burma is still far from achieving a country-wide ceasefire agreement. Until there are solutions to the political goals of ethnic resistance groups that address the root causes of the conflict, there will be no peace or freedom for the ethnic people of Burma.

Millions of foreign dollars have been poured into the lucrative peace industry, mostly directed towards the Burma Government. This is all the while the government has oppressed the ethnic civilians, stolen their resources, and systematically impoverished them for decades. Many Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) are genuinely supported by their people who often seek the protection and patronage of these organisations. For genuine peace, these organisations would need to be empowered to meet the government on a level playing field where they can negotiate for real and lasting solutions. Instead, much of the foreign peace funds are now used to lure EAOs into signing ceasefires in exchange for receiving foreign aid and other benefits. There is nothing new in having controversial ceasefires in Burma's signed for all the wrong reasons, but this time international actors are providing the carrots, dividing and weakening the movement working towards genuine and lasting peace.

At the time of writing, more than 600,000 remain internally displaced, most of them in southeast Burma. Hundreds of thousands have also fled conflict and persecution to neighbouring Thailand, where around 100,000 refugees still reside in nine refugee camps. Despite growing pressures to return coupled with decreasing aid and support, most refugees have stayed in the camps, citing reasons such as Burma Army militarisation, lands riddled with landmines, and ongoing conflict as obstacles to return. As life in the camps and future prospects for refugees have become grim during the past years, troubling social trends such as suicides among the youth are on the rise.

Although many organisations have moved at least some of their operations inside the country in recent years, the Thailand-Burma border is still home to a highly-organised – albeit less supported – movement that continues to work towards a free and peaceful Burma. Many organisations are



based in Thailand for reasons such as ability to reach vulnerable displaced populations on both sides of the border as well as being able to write and campaign freely without self-censorship. Regrettably many operations and activities run by ethnic organisations and service providers have stopped since donors started shifting their funds from the border towards the central government system. Others have been pushed by donors to move inside, oftentimes resulting in self-censorship and reduced capacity. The shift in funding is not only deeply impacting vulnerable conflict affected populations whose lives depend on aid and cross-border operations, but it also poses a severe impediment for achieving peace, when the historically oppressed ethnic nationalities are increasingly disempowered and silenced.

Whilst the National League for Democracy's landslide victory in the 2015 election gave much hope for change, many ethnic nationalities have lost hope after witnessing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's unwillingness or inability to speak out and stand up for their rights. In 2016, armed conflicts and serious human rights violations such as torture and killings increased substantially when compared to the year 2015. Furthermore, the constitution guarantees that the Burmese military has ultimate power all the way down to the village level, and the military's offensives and human rights violations in ethnic areas can carry on with impunity. For countless of ethnic civilians in exile and in Burma's borderlands, peace process is a priority and constitutional change a necessity.

The ethnic plight has always played a key role in the lack of freedom in Burma. In order to realise a free, peaceful and federal democratic Burma, marginalised populations including ethnic nationalities and conflict-affected communities must be able to contribute towards political, social, and economic equality by actively participating in the peace and nation building processes that shape the country's future. One of the best ways to measure the extent of Burma's reforms and progress is to listen to these communities.

Burma Link has developed a number of activities in order to amplify the voices of Burma's ethnic nationalities and displaced populations along the Thailand-Burma border.

## Vision

Burma Link envisions a free, peaceful and federal democratic Burma where marginalised populations including ethnic nationalities and conflict-affected communities are inspired and able to contribute towards political, social, and economic equality by actively participating in the peace and nation building processes that shape the country's future. We envision the people of Burma achieving full human rights, justice, and equality, and celebrating unity-in-a rich diversity of perspectives, cultures, and customs.

## Mission

Burma Link is an information sharing organisation that advocates for the rights of Burma's marginalised ethnic nationalities and displaced conflict-affected communities, and promotes national unity and genuine peace by:

1. Providing easy access to background information and latest updates on the armed conflict, displacement, and the peace process based on reports by local and international media and organisations. We update our website and social media channels daily with the latest news and publications, and produce monthly situation updates. We also maintain an extensive database of local and international media reports related to our focus areas and share this information with interested stakeholders.
2. Amplifying the voices of the disempowered and disenfranchised ethnic and displaced populations via publishing extensive life stories and in depth interviews of persons affected by conflict with unheard perspectives and from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, and locations.
3. Collaborating with a range of local organisations to build their capacity and empower them towards reaching their goals. We conduct research and produce advocacy tools for local organisations to use in their efforts to ensure that the re-building of Burma includes the diverse perspectives from the ground. We also advocate directly through activities such as arranging meetings with stakeholders, diplomatic briefing, and campaigns to promote genuine peace and rights-based policy.
4. Facilitating communication and information exchange between (1) national actors to create a common understanding and a shared vision for the future, and (2) national and international actors to ensure that the latter understand and appreciate local contexts and engage in inclusive and just approaches that respect the rights and uphold the voices of Burma's marginalised ethnic and displaced populations.

## Values

### 1. Freedom, equality, dignity, and respect

- We reaffirm that all people are born free and equal and all have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their differences in ethnicity, gender, age, religion, culture, customs and traditions
- We recognise that all people are individuals who have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, speech, expression and religion
- We respect diversity and are committed to openness and non-discrimination.

### 2. Passion, commitment, and excellence

- We are passionate about our vision and deeply committed to our values and mission
- We constantly strive for excellence in everything we do, and challenge ourselves to the highest levels of learning, professionalism and performance to achieve greater impact.

### 3. Integrity, trust, and responsibility

- We are open, honest and direct in our communication with each other and all our stakeholders



- We act consistently with our mission, being honest and transparent in what we do and say, and accept responsibility for our collective and individual actions.

#### 4. Empowerment, community involvement, and cooperation

- We believe that people have the right to make their own decisions and control their own lives
- We are committed to upholding the voices of the people of Burma, and reaffirm that change and efforts to build peaceful and just society should be led by people from that society
- We recognise the value of cooperation and partnership and believe that creating a shared vision and working effectively towards it is essential for bringing about positive change in Burma.

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*We are deeply passionate about the ethnic plight and genuinely care about every individual that we work with. We would never jeopardise anyone's identity or dignity in order to "get a good story." We respect the people's feelings and concerns and will always put them before media coverage or anything else. We consistently work with high levels of respect and consideration for the people of Burma in everything we do.*

## Goals

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### 1) Help Burma's marginalised ethnic and displaced people reach out and have their voices heard

In order for Burma to transform to a peaceful and democratic society based on freedom and justice, the voices Burma's marginalised populations 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 vulnerable ethnic and conflict affected 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 actions, 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.

### 2) Help the world reach in and understand the dynamics in Burma's ethnic areas and on the Thailand-Burma border

As the international community is shifting its policies toward Burma, it is arguably of crucial importance that they are aware of the conditions in Burma's rural conflict-affected ethnic areas. All attempts to address the humanitarian crisis and promote positive developments in Burma require a

clear acknowledgement and awareness of the local context. Having access to local voices and stories can help international actors feel more empathy and get more involved, learn more about the situation and gear them towards more just and effective action that does not side-line ethnic organisations, refugees and other conflict-affected communities.

### **3) Help the people of Burma understand the dynamics in Burma's ethnic areas and on the Thailand-Burma border**

At this critical time of change in Burma's political landscape, it is arguably of crucial importance that the people of Burma are aware of the conditions in Burma's rural conflict-affected ethnic areas, and understand the underlying dynamics behind the prolonged conflict and suffering. If Burma is to celebrate unity in diversity, Burma's ethnic groups need to learn about and communicate with one another.

### **4) Advocacy and influence on policy-making**

Burma Link advocates for the rights of Burma's marginalised ethnic nationalities and displaced conflict-affected communities to ensure that the re-building of Burma includes the diverse perspectives from the ground.

## **Activities and Outcomes**

*Burma Link is an information sharing organisation that advocates for the rights of Burma's marginalised ethnic nationalities and displaced conflict-affected communities. Burma Link amplifies the voices of these disempowered and disenfranchised populations and projects them into local and global conversations to ensure that the re-building of Burma includes the diverse and unheard perspectives of the conflict-affected communities on the ground. Burma Link promotes unity and national reconciliation through storytelling and facilitating information exchange between different peoples of Burma to create a common understanding and a shared vision for the future. Burma Link also provides national and international actors with easy access to in depth information and voices from the ground in order to promote genuine peace and rights-based policy.*

**Table 1. Summary of Burma Link's goals, activities and outcomes in 2016**

<b>GOAL (1) Help Burma's marginalised ethnic and displaced people reach out and have their voices heard</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Activity/Outcome</b>
1.1. Publish voices of the people of Burma on Burma Link's website	Published 22 stories/interviews with ethnic and displaced people of Burma from diverse backgrounds, including EAO leaders and soldiers, CSO leaders, students, refugees, and IDPs.
1.2. Broaden the audience and reach for voices of the people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Published voices on our English website, which' audience has steadily increased.</li> <li>Started publishing regular e-newsletters in September 2016.</li> <li>Published book of life stories "Lives on the Line," which is available for purchasing online and in book shops in Burma.</li> </ul>
1.3. Undertake projects that let the voices of the people be heard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued the interviewing and storytelling project throughout the year.</li> <li>Published a joint Mon IDP report with HURFOM and Burma Partnership in English and Burmese.</li> <li>Published a short animation summarising the situation of Mon IDPs in English and Burmese.</li> <li>Launched "Lives on the Line."</li> <li>Started filming a joint documentary with KSNB and KYO in September 2016.</li> </ul>
1.4. Manage Agents of Change Leadership Program	Spread the 3-day Empowered Life and Leadership Skills (ELLS) course in English and Burmese to a variety of CSOs and NGOs.
<b>GOAL (2) Help the world reach in and understand the dynamics in Burma's ethnic areas and on the Thailand-Burma border</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Activity/Outcome</b>
2.1. Provide international actors with easy access to information on Burma Link's website	Burma Link's English website provides international actors with a host of background information as well as a comprehensive collection of resources focusing on Burma's conflict and displacement situation. We updated the website daily and regularly published reports and press releases particularly by local CBOs.
2.2. Broaden international audience and reach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The English website average audience was over 600 visits per day for the year 2016, according to <i>Awstats</i>. Continued publishing electronic English newsletters.</li> <li>Burma Link's English Facebook page had 3,720 followers by March 3, 2017.</li> <li>Burma Link's Twitter had over 863 followers by March 3, 2017.</li> </ul>
<b>GOAL (3) Help the people of Burma understand the dynamics in Burma's ethnic areas and on the Thailand-Burma border</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Activity/Outcome</b>
3.1. Provide local actors with easy access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burma Link's Burmese website provides local actors with a host of background information on the situation in Burma and on the Thailand-</li> </ul>

on Burma Link's website	<p>Burma border as well as a comprehensive collection of resources that we updated as new publications were released.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the year, we published seven stories of people of Burma on the Burmese website.</li> <li>• We started selling "Lives on the Line" in Burmese in book shops inside Burma.</li> </ul>
3.2. Broaden Burmese audience and reach	Burma Link's Burmese Facebook page had 3,724 followers by March 3, 2017.
<b>GOAL (4) Advocacy and influence on policy-making</b>	
4.1. Publication and advocacy about IDPs and/or refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published the joint Mon IDP report "Invisible Lives" with HURFOM and Burma Partnership.</li> <li>• Launched the report in a press conference in Rangoon on August 12 and Moulmein on August 15.</li> <li>• The report was featured in 4 English and 9 Burmese language media.</li> <li>• Jointly arranged diplomatic briefings about the report with HURFOM and Burma Partnership.</li> </ul>
4.2. Publishing statements/op-eds on current issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published statements in collaboration with CSO and NGO groups working towards free Burma.</li> </ul>
4.3. Influencing through networking and cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participated and facilitated the participation of the KSNG in the APCRR6 (Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Consultation) in Bangkok in September.</li> <li>• Participated in the UPR Workshop in Mae Sot in June and August.</li> <li>• Became an official member of the APRRN.</li> </ul>

## Interviews and Stories

Since 2013, Burma Link has been collecting stories from refugees, ethnic leaders, jungle medics, women activists, former political prisoners, migrant students, and freedom fighters along the Thailand-Burma border. These are unheard stories of incredible spirit and resilience, stories of courage, and voices of hope and dreams that have emerged from decades of oppression. Burma Link also regularly publishes in-depth issue-focused interviews particularly with ethnic and women leaders. Stories and issue-focused interviews on the website – <http://www.burmalink.org/voices/>.



In March 2016, Burma Link published a book, "Lives on the Line: Voices for Change from the Thailand-Burma Border," that features a collection of life stories from the border area. These collected stories provide an inside perspective to the conflict, the history, and the current situation from those who have experienced it first-hand. The book is being sold in a number of locations in Mae Sot as well as in book shops across

Burma. The English book is also being sold as a print and electronic copy via Lulu.com and Amazon.com.

*“Lives on the Line” at Lulu.com:*

Paperback: <http://www.lulu.com/shop/burma-link/lives-on-the-line-voices-for-change-from-the-thailand-burma-border/paperback/product-22593685.html>

E-book: <http://www.lulu.com/shop/burma-link/lives-on-the-line-voices-for-change-from-the-thailand-burma-border/ebook/product-22561680.html>

Press release about the book launch: <http://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Lives-on-the-Line-press-release.pdf>

During the year 2016, we published altogether 22 stories or interviews on our English website, and seven stories on our Burmese website. The stories profiled people from various backgrounds, including refugees and IDPs, students, EAO leaders and soldiers, and various CSO representatives. Ethnicities of the people included Karen, Burman, Mon, Tavoy, Kachin, Arakanese (Rakhine), and Ta’ang (Palaung).

## 2016 TOP INTERVIEWS

### 1. Update and Voices from Karen Community Amidst Conflict and Uncertain Political Process: General Nerdah Mya and Villagers Speak

*Published November 18 – 585 Facebook recommendations/shares*



*Important events affecting the Karen political destiny and the peace process have taken place recently. The conflict between the Burma Army and its proxy BGF (Border Guard Force) and a splinter group of the DKBA [that took back the old name Democratic Karen Buddhist Army] around Mae Ta War area on the Thailand-Burma border displaced around 5,000 Karen civilians between August and October, threatening to derail the peace process and raising alarm bells for the Karen NCA ('Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement) signatory groups KNU (Karen National Union) and the DKBA (Democratic Karen Benevolent Army). Another event shocking many Karen and other actors was the postponement of the KNU Congress that was scheduled to be held this month [November] and would have included electing a new leadership, an event anticipated by many local and international observers who have openly disagreed with many of the decisions made by the current leadership, headed by Saw Mutu Say Poe, described them as being driven by self-interest. Burma Link interviewed Major General*

*Nerdah Bo Mya, the head of the KNDO (Karen National Defence Organisation – under the KNU), as well as a school teacher and students residing in a village near Mae Ta War and under the protection of the KNDO to hear their views about the recent events.*

“We [ethnic leaders] all have to work together since we have the same objectives and goals to achieve. We want freedom, they [other ethnic leaders] also want freedom. We need self-determination, and they want the same thing. So, we have to consolidate our strengths, bring ourselves back together and not fall into the Burmese trap and strategies. We need to think about the national issue instead of self-interest and our own politics, and if we can all work together is not very hard to defeat the Burmese. We have an achievable goal, tangible goal that we can achieve. If we can and we know how to combine ourselves together it is not too hard to achieve our goal...” Read [full story on the website](#).

## **2. ‘It Is Very Important that We Are All United’: Naw K’Nyaw Paw, Secretary of the Karen Women Organisation**

*Published November 24 – 516 Facebook recommendations/shares*

*In this video interview, the Secretary of the Karen Women Organization (KWO), Naw K’Nyaw Paw, discusses the ‘Nationwide’ Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and the need for unity in Burma. She discusses the silence of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the duplicity of the international community about human rights. Naw K’Nyaw Paw concludes with a message to the Karen people.*

“We need to be united with the other ethnic armed organisations so that we are stronger. And then, we don’t want [how] the Burmese government has divided us and we have to learn our lesson, otherwise we will be suffering again and again, so it’s very important that we all work together, and then speaking out for things that we see are not right, and then really advocating for changes that we want to see. So it’s time now, or we don’t have the opportunity and we lose our opportunity.

And also, we need to support the leaders that are following the policies and strongly support them so that we can have a good leadership who are negotiating for our cause and who are representing our people and our inspiration. This is very important; that Karen all over the world, not only the Karen that are in Burma, or in the KNU administration area, but also Karen people from abroad; everybody needs to come together and then have a unified voice. And the Karen people, the situation in Burma, we cannot solve it alone...” Read [full story on the website](#).

## **3. ‘If the Military Really Agree to Have the Genuine Peace Process, Tomorrow We Can Get Peace’: Moon Nay Li, General Sec of KWAT**

*Published September 21 – 485 Facebook recommendations/shares*



Moon Nay Li is the General Secretary of the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT), an organisation which she joined in 2002 in order to work for her people and community. Whilst Burma's de facto leader State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi talks peace, on the ground Burma Army attacks and offensives have recently intensified in Kachin areas. The government troops have continued their military build-up in Kachin and northern Shan State, launching large-scale offensives, including aerial bombings, and targeting Kachin civilians. In this interview, Moon Nay Li discusses her views regarding the current state of the peace process, including the 21st Century Panglong Conference and women's participation in the process, explaining that “they are trying to do peace negotiations and for NCA

(‘Nationwide’ Ceasefire Agreement) process to happen but on the other hand, they are sending more troops ... So how can we trust the military as our civilians [are targeted]?” Moon Nay Li says that the international community lacks understanding about the on the ground situation, making it more difficult to do advocacy work internationally. In reality, however, she points out that when comes to the ethnic plight, “Aung San Suu Kyi cannot do nothing. She cannot solve the



ethnic problems, because the military has more power than her.” Moon Nay Li also expresses concerns over the U.S. Government lifting sanctions as they are “really important to give pressure to have genuine peace in our country.” Moon Nay Li hopes for an inclusive peace process where women’s voices are also heard. The active advocacy and lobbying for women’s participation by KWAT and other women’s groups resulted in ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) agreeing on at least 30% women’s participation last year, and since then Moon Nay Li has witnessed EAOs bringing more women to negotiations and meetings, saying that “we feel really happy for their [EAOs] recognising and also for inviting the women’s groups.” For the NLD-led Government, Moon Nay Li urges the government to implement an inclusive peace process, continue to support refugees and IDPs, and also to respect human rights in ethnic areas. She also urges the international community to listen to the voices of ethnic people and the ground situation.

“Actually it is very easy to solve the problem. It is very [much] depending on the military side. If the military really agree to have the genuine peace process, tomorrow we can get the peace in our country. It is... We are really sorry for the current peace process. Now among the ethnic groups have also misunderstandings between them, especially the leaders, not low level, so they cannot understand each other and they have different ideas to approach a genuine peace. Actually all really want peace, and all really want ethnic equality, all really want self-determination but the approaches and ideas are totally different sometimes. So that’s why current peace process is really dangerous...” [Read full story on the website.](#)

## 2016 TOP STORIES

### 1. ‘Sometimes I Ask Myself, Do I Have a Country?’: Young Peace Builder and Refugee

Published September 15 – 706 Facebook recommendations/shares



Mee Lay is a 25-year-old inspiring young refugee woman who spent her early years in malaria infested jungle hideouts with constant food insecurity and struggle to go to school. Despite her childhood memories including bombings and flows of wounded soldiers, the biggest challenge for Mee Lay was attaining education. Mee Lay arrived at Nu Poe refugee camp in 2012 after having lived in Ban Don Yang refugee camp in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand, for six years. Growing up amidst armed conflict, Mee Lay and her family finally fled across the border to Thailand during a large scale Burma Army offensive in 1997, first blending into the migrant landscape before moving to Ban Don Yang refugee camp. For Mee Lay, education was the first priority, and after years of struggle, she was

finally able to access higher education in Nu Poe refugee camp. There she learned about issues such as human rights, advocacy, public speaking and conflict management. As part of her studies, Mee Lay was even able to go back to her homeland for the first time since she was a little girl, running peace building workshops with local communities. Despite her high level of education—clearly noticeable to anyone engaging with this young talented and open-minded woman—her education is not recognised in Burma nor in Thailand. In this story, Mee Lay shares about her hopes and dreams and also the incredible struggles that she and her family have been through. “I hope that my story, a simple story, is worthy a lesson or case study or something like this for the others to learn,” Mee Lay says humbly, whilst having a profound impact on anyone listening to her..

“Peace is when individuals or people have their freedom to speak or have freedom to express their feelings or have freedom to believe their own religions. There is peace, and then [people] live together with diversity, and then cooperation. [They are] not seen as a different but as the same. Yes, I think that’s peace for me.” [Read full story on the website.](#)

## 2. 'FREEDOM is More Important than Anything': Karen Major General Nerdah Bo Mya

*Published June 15 – 606 Facebook recommendations/shares*



*Nerdah Bo Mya was born in a small Karen village in a KNU (Karen National Union) controlled area near Manerplaw—the former headquarters of the KNU and the pro-democracy movement—as the son of the late General Bo Mya who was the President of the KNU from 1976 to 2000. After being educated in Thailand and in the USA, the young graduate's short visit to the Thailand-Burma border turned into a life-long mission, as Nerdah witnessed the 1994 Karen split from the KNU in what he describes as 'the blackest day' of their history. Nerdah realised that he had to stay and do something for his people who otherwise 'will not survive.' He started working for KNU foreign affairs, meeting with diplomats and politicians, spreading international awareness about the Karen struggle for freedom and equality.*

*A few years later he became a battalion commander and fought in the front lines against the Burmese army, painfully witnessing many of his comrades killed and wounded in the battle fields. After two decades of indescribable hardship and unwavering dedication for the cause, Nerdah is now the Major General and the Chief of Staff of the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO). This empathetic "rebel" leader emphasises that it is not just the Karen people but the whole nation of 60 million people who are still suffering and need to be freed.*

*"Then I heard about the fighting, the political problems, and then the refugees started moving into Thailand. And then I realised that Karen people are not recognised and we need to gain back our freedom. They started talking about these things and every Friday the KNU leaders would come to our school and talk about the political situation, the military situation, and the refugees. So we listened and we learned, and I realised then, 'we've got a problem...'" Read [full story on the website](#).*

## 3. 'We Hear About How 'We Have to Return... We Have to Return': Former Nu Poe Refugee Camp Leader

*Published July 21 – 259 Facebook recommendations/shares*



*Saw Lah Hset Plet Htee is a Bible schoolteacher and a religious leader who has spent the past thirty years living in Nu Poe refugee camp on the Thailand-Burma border. He originally fled his native Karen State because the Burma Army attempted to kill him, thinking he was a spy for the Karen National Union (KNU). Saw Lah Hset Plet Htee was amongst the first refugees to set up Nu Poe camp and to work side by side with international aid workers, KNU and village leaders as well as Thai officials. He has been the camp leader for Nu Poe on and off for over a decade. Here Saw Lah Hset Plet Htee shares a rarely heard account on the history of Nu Poe and Ban Don Yang refugee camps as well as about the inner workings of the camp. "You and your family, you have problems and difficulties. As for me, I live with 3,000 families, so can you think out about the problems we have?" he explains. Saw Lah Hset Plet Htee also*

*discusses reduced aid and problems that have emerged since "the UNHCR has begun pressuring refugees to repatriate back to Burma."*

*"I know that they [the UNHCR] have only one main office in Bangkok, but members of the UNHCR used to come to the camp and different people would come and give us different information. [...] They did not give us much information; we*

have to find places to live by ourselves. They do not help with shelters or buildings. Also, if a person goes back they have to leave all of their things here and they will lose their registration with the UN. One person who was planning to return told the UN: 'I will go back and if anything happens I will come back. Will you give my registration document back to me?' The UN told him no. It's a big problem. Probably they will not get it back, and there is only one person who would like to return." Read [full interview on the website](#).

## Advocating for refugees and IDPs

At this critical time of change inside Burma and in the Thailand-Burma border camps, Burma Link continues to advocate for Burma's displaced populations, particularly refugees in Thailand and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in eastern Burma.

In 2016, we collaborated with the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) and Burma Partnership to produce a report, ["Invisible Lives: The Untold Story of Displacement Cycle in Burma,"](#) bringing attention to the plight of Mon IDPs. The report was launched in a press conference in Rangoon and Moulmein in August 2016 and it was widely featured in international and local media. We also collaborated with HURFOM and Burma Partnership to arrange a number of diplomatic briefings about the situation of Mon IDPs and other ethnic displaced populations along the Thailand-Burma border area.

To mark the World Refugee Day held on June 20<sup>th</sup>, we also published an animation in [English](#) and [Burmese](#) summarising the situation of the Mon IDPs.

Burma Link conducted all the interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) for the report in partnership with HURFOM, facilitated by Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC) and other local CBOs. The interviews and FGDs were conducted in four different IDP sites in the NMSP-controlled ceasefire areas, as well as in Moulmein and in and around Ye Township in government-controlled areas of southeast Burma. A total of 29 interviews and 5 FGDs were conducted in southeast Burma and along the border in total with 60 interviewees. Burma Link also wrote one full section in the report.

*The full report "Invisible Lives: The Untold Story of Displacement Cycle in Burma"*

English (PDF): <http://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/FINAL-Eng-IDP-Report.pdf>

Burmese (PDF): <http://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/FINAL-Bur-IDP-Report.pdf>

*Press Release: Burma Government's Reforms Must Address Root Causes of Displacement in Ethnic Areas*

English (PDF): <http://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/English-PR-IDP-Report-FINAL.pdf>

Burmese (PDF): <http://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/IDP-PR-Final-Burmese.pdf>

*The animation "From Refugees to IDPs: Untold Story of Displacement Cycle in Burma"*

English: <https://youtu.be/OuK1JOyjug0>

Burmese: <https://youtu.be/ON9swTwd02U>

- Burma Link's English Facebook page had over 3,720 followers by March 3, 2017.

## Media

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Burma Link is committed to helping both local and international actors take effective and just action to help the people of Burma, by providing them with easy access to background information and recent developments inside the country and around its troubled borders. Our focus is especially on providing information about Burma's armed conflict and displacement situation and amplifying the voices of Burma's disempowered and disenfranchised ethnic and displaced populations.

The information on Burma Link's English and Burmese websites are divided into three main parts; (1) Background Information, (2) Voices of the People, and (3) Resource Collection.

### English website

Burma Link's English website presents a host of background information on Burma and the Thailand-Burma border, the most comprehensive package of clearly referenced background information easily and freely accessible online. The website also creates a platform for the people of Burma to have their voices and stories heard, and includes a comprehensive collection of resources including reports, documentaries, news, articles and press releases. The website is updated every few days and we try to publish at least one life story or in-depth interview each month. The website can be accessed at <http://www.burmalink.org/>.

The background information has over 100 pages of clearly referenced information about Burma and the border, including images and statistics. The collection library includes news, press releases, and over 50 reports published by our partnering organisations. We also publish articles and documentaries as well as photo galleries put together by us and our website visitors.

### Burmese website

Burma Link's Burmese website presents a host of background information on Burma and the Thailand-Burma border, creates a platform for the people of Burma to have their voices heard locally, and includes a collection of key resources compiled from different sources. The Burmese website can be accessed at <http://burmese.burmalink.org/>.

### Social Media

- Facebook (English)

Burma Link's English Facebook page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/burmalink>. The Facebook page had 3,720 followers by March 3, 2017.

- Facebook (Burmese)

Burma Link's Burmese Facebook page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/burmalinkburmese> . The Facebook page had 3,724 followers by March 3, 2017.

- Twitter

Burma Link's Twitter account can be accessed at <https://twitter.com/burmalink>. Burma Link's Twitter had 863 followers by March 3, 2017.

- YouTube

Burma Link's YouTube account can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/user/burmalink>. The account had 35 followers by March 3, 2017.

- E-newsletter

In September 2016, we started publishing a monthly electronic newsletter. The newsletter had 184 subscribers by March 3, 2017. Subscribe – <http://www.burmalink.org/subscribe/>

## Burma Link in other media

Burma Link's book "Lives on the Line" and Mon IDP report "Invisible Lives" were featured in a number of English and Burmese language media, including TV and online publications.

### "Lives on the Line" in media:

Karen Information Centre (KIC). "ကြိုးတန်းပေါ်က ဘဝများ"စာအုပ် ဘားမားလင့်ခ်(BURMA LINK)က ပထမဦးဆုံးအကြိမ် ထုတ်ဝေ. Published March 16, 2016, at <http://ow.ly/DoMJ30aqtu6>

### "Invisible Lives" in media:

#### News Articles

Feliz Solomon / DVB. *A cautionary tale of displacement in Mon State*. Published August 12, 2016, at <http://www.dvb.no/news/a-cautionary-tale-of-displacement-in-mon-state/69427>

Zue Zue / The Irrawaddy. *Ethnic Mon IDPs Concerned About Declining Aid*. Published August 16, 2016, at <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/ethnic-mon-idps-concerned-about-declining-aid.html>

MiTV. *Invisible Lives: IDPs Resettlement Report*. Published August 12, 2016, at <http://www.myanmaritv.com/news/invisible-lives-idps-resettlement-report>



Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA). *Over 35,000 Mon IDPs Fear Declining Support*. Published August 18, 2016, at <http://monnews.org/2016/08/17/over-35000-mon-idps-fear-declining-support/>

နန်းမြန်မာ / DVB. *နိုင်ငံရေးပြုပြင်ပြောင်းလဲမှု ကြားကာလ ပြည်တွင်းဒုက္ခသည်များ အခက်အခဲဖြစ်*. Published August 12, 2016, at <http://burmese.dvb.no/archives/163509>

Radio Free Asia (RFA). *လူမသိသူမသိ ဘဝများ အစီရင်ခံစာ ထုတ်ပြန်*. Published August 13, 2016, at <http://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/hurfom-statement-08132016013742.html>

Myanmar Now. *မွန်ဒုက္ခသည်များ နေရပ်ပြန်ရန် အဆင်သင့်မဖြစ်သေး*. Published August 12, 2016, at <http://www.myanmar-now.org/my/news/i/?id=a6885eae-389a-49d2-986b-5db09e3da235>

MoeMaKa. *အိချယ်ရီအောင် - မွန်ဒုက္ခသည်များ နေရပ်ပြန်ရန် အဆင်သင့်မဖြစ်သေး*. Published August 13, 2016, at <http://moemaka.com/archives/53082>

Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA). *မှန်ပညာသဗ္ဗနယုမ္မရေ၌ IDP မပြန်ရေပျံ့ပွန်ရန် အဆင်သင့်မဖြစ်သေးဟု လူ့အခွင့်အရေးလှုပ်ရှားသူများဆို*. Published August 18, 2016, at <http://ow.ly/aCQQ30aqujE>

Burma News International (BNI). *မွန်ပြည်သစ်နယ်မြေရှိ IDP များနေရပ်ပြန်ရန် အဆင်သင့်မဖြစ်သေးဟု လူ့အခွင့်အရေးလှုပ်ရှားသူများဆို*. Published August 18, 2016, at <http://ow.ly/nEEj30aquIT>

#### TV:

DVB (Burmese). *နှစ် ၂၀ ကျော် နေရ ပိစွန့်ခွာတဲ့ မွန်တိုင်းရင်းသား နေရပ်ပြန်ဖို့မသေချာ*. Published August 12, 2016. Available also on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eihw-OSGrw0>

MRTV (Burmese)

MITV (English)

Channel 7



# Identity

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Legal name:	Burma Link ry
Legal status:	Registered as a non-profit organisation
Registration number:	210.930
Date of Registration:	August 29, 2013
Based in:	Thailand
Email:	office@burmalink.org
English website:	<a href="http://www.burmalink.org/">http://www.burmalink.org/</a>
English Facebook:	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/burmalink">https://www.facebook.com/burmalink</a>
Burmese website:	<a href="http://burmese.burmalink.org/">http://burmese.burmalink.org/</a>
Burmese Facebook:	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/burmalinkburmese">https://www.facebook.com/burmalinkburmese</a>



*Burma Link advocates for Burma's ethnic nationalities and displaced people, and shares their stories and voices with the world.*



**BURMA  
LINK**

**Burma Link**  
***Voices for Change.***

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