

KEEP SUPPORTING DISPLACED POPULATIONS ALONG THE THAILAND-BURMA/MYANMAR BORDER

Burma Link | September 11, 2017

KEEP SUPPORTING CAMPAIGN

International support for IDPs in the southeast is set to stop after September 2017 and it is currently uncertain how IDPs' basic needs will be met from October onwards. Burma Link urges international donors and non-governmental organisations to continue supporting Burma's IDPs and refugees until a long-term plan is in place for basic needs provision for the displaced populations or until they are able to voluntarily return in safety and dignity.

* [Click here for urgent Karen appeal \(and bank details\)](#)

* [Click here for urgent Shan appeal](#)

To support the appeals of local organisations in the current crisis, Burma Link is undertaking the "Keep Supporting" advocacy campaign with weekly alternating themes bringing you essential information and resources, calling for inclusive planning and sustainable solutions, and amplifying the voices of IDPs and refugees and organisations that represent them.

#KeepSupporting #NotSafeToReturn #CrossBorderAid

GET INVOLVED

- Donate directly to Ei Thu Ha Karen IDP camp support committee (details below).
- Read about the situation – See list of resources at the bottom of this post.
- Follow Burma Link's campaign on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Use the #KeepSupporting #NotSafeToReturn and #CrossBorderAid hashtags to spread the word about the cause.

Bank Details:

Bank Account Holder: Mr. MA MA and Mr. THAWEEWIT DIBUEHAE
Bank Account Number: 303-707389-1
Bank Name: Bangkok Bank
Bank SWIFT Code: BKKBTHBK
Bank Address: 17, ASIA ROAD, MAE SOT, TAK – 63110
Telephone Number: 055-506997

NOTE: We are sharing these details with the permission from Ei Thu Hta IDP Supporting Committee. All donations are used for life saving support for IDPs in Ei Thu Hta camp.

Contacts:

Mahn Mahn – +66 879438750
Naw Ta Mla Saw – +66 810255738
Thaweevit Dibuehae – +66 811684357
Email Address: ettidpsc@gmail.com

FACTSHEET

Urgency about the current situation

- The Border Consortium (TBC), the main food and service provider to Burma/Myanmar's refugees and IDPs, will cease food assistance to 5 IDP camps due to "competing humanitarian concerns." These include Karen IDP camp Ei Thu Hta and four Shan IDP camps with a total population of over 8,200 people.
- Karen and Shan groups have released emergency appeals, urging international donors to continue humanitarian aid.
- All the IDP camps are located in areas controlled by Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and can only be reached with cross-border aid. Organisations operating from inside Burma have no access to these areas.
- Most IDPs in these camps cannot return and are uncertain how they will survive after the support is cut.
- Although current cuts are directed at IDPs, refugees in the Thai camps have also been affected by funding reductions since 2012.
- The reductions in funding have been spurred by the ongoing peace process and the narrative of democratic transition in Burma.
- Lack of funding is indirectly forcing IDPs and refugees to return before they can do so in safety and dignity, possibly leading to a case of constructive refoulement.
- Although there is less fighting now in the southeast, the area has been a conflict zone for decades and still hosts the majority of the country's conflict-affected IDPs whose needs can currently not be met through the Burma Government system.

Causes of displacement (east and southeast)

- Armed conflict between Burma Army and EAOs. Despite recent ceasefires, sporadic conflict and associated displacement has continued in Karen State. In southern Shan State, Burma Army has continuously breached the 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement (in northern Shan State conflict is ongoing).
- Burma Army strategies directly targeting civilians. The infamous Four Cuts strategy resulted in the destruction and burning of over 3,500 villages in Karen, Karenni, and Shan State between 1985-2010.
- Various humanitarian and human rights violations on the ground, primarily perpetrated by the Burma Army and its proxy armies/militias but also ethnic armed groups. These violations have directly or indirectly targeted ethnic civilian populations, often on the basis of an alleged affiliation with ethnic armed groups.
- Violations experienced by ethnic communities. These include extra-judicial and indiscriminate killings, rape and sexual violence, torture, destruction and burning of houses, forced relocation, forced labor and portering, forced recruitment, enforced disappearances, the use of landmines etc.

IDPs in Southeast Burma/Myanmar

- Around 400,000 IDPs (2012 figure – more recent estimates are from smaller survey areas and suggest no significant change)
- The 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the government led around 37,000 IDPs to attempt to return or resettle. Since then, the

number of returns has drastically slowed down and numerous more have been displaced by conflict in the Karen State, most recently during this month (September 2017).

- Many IDPs live in impoverished communities with limited access to essential resources (such as food and drinkable water) and services (health and education).
- Due to their proximity to the border, life-saving assistance (usually delivered by ethnic service providers backed up by international organisations such as the TBC) has reached Burma's IDPs across the border from Thailand.
- The current funding halt concerns the remaining five TBC-supported IDP camps that international organisations have supported since they were founded 11-18 years ago.

Refugees along the Thailand-Burma/Myanmar border

- Around 100,000 refugees (according to the latest [TBC figure from July 2017](#))
- The first refugee camps in Thailand were established in 1984.
- The composition of the camps is mainly Karen (80%) and Karenni (10%). The remaining 10% belong to various ethnic nationalities and many are also Burman political dissidents.
- Nine refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border (7 Karen and 2 Karenni camps). Mae La refugee camp is the biggest of the camps, sheltering over 40,000 people. There is also one Shan refugee camp, not under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- TBC is the main agency in charge of providing aid and coordinating humanitarian assistance to the refugees. TBC works in collaboration with the UNHCR.
- The Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) and Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) manage the camps and are the overall representatives of the refugees living in the camps.
- Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not recognize the refugee status. Burma's refugees in Thailand have restricted freedom of movement and expression. Thai authorities have allowed only a few refugees to register with the UNHCR since 2006. Nearly half of the refugees are unregistered.

OBSTACLES TO RETURN FOR IDPS AND REFUGEES

Safety

- Uncertain peace process
- Fragile ceasefires and sporadic conflict in ceasefire areas
- Ongoing militarization
- Humanitarian/human rights abuse on the ground
- Landmines

Socio-economic factors

- Lack of livelihood opportunities
- Loss of land and increasing investment-driven land confiscation
- Burma Government's non-compliance with international human rights law and standards (e.g. Pinheiro Principles)
- Lack of economic/employment opportunities
- Lack of essential services such as health and education
- Non-recognition of ethnic/refugee education and health certificates

Insufficient planning and preparations

- International support for IDPs is stopping without a comprehensive plan for IDPs' livelihood and survival.
- Lack of clear and accessible information about repatriation given to refugees and refugee-led organisations.
- Lack of meaningful consultation and participation of affected communities and local organisations in the return planning process. The high-profile repatriation of 71 refugees in October 2016 - facilitated by the UNHCR and Burmese and Thai Governments - was conducted without the participation of refugee-led organisations.
- Lack of Burma Government policies and preparedness to receive the refugees as demonstrated by problems faced by the refugees who returned in October 2016, many of whom expressed regret about returning.

RECOMMENDED READING

Urgent Appeals

Ei Tu Hta IDP Supporting Committee. 'Ei Htu Hta IDPs Supporting Committee Letter of Appeal for Continue Cross Border Humanitarian Aid' (September 4, 2017).

<https://www.burmalink.org/ei-htu-hta-idps-supporting-committee-letter-appeal-continue-cross-border-humanitarian-aid/>

Shan State Refugee Committee (Thai Border). 'Urgent Appeal From The Shan State Refugee Committee (Thai Border) To The International Community' (August 30, 2017).

<https://www.burmalink.org/urgent-appeal-shan-state-refugee-committee-thai-border-international-community/>

Position papers

Karen National Union Concerned Group (KNU CG). 'Position Statement on Current Political Development and Assistance to Refugees' (July 31, 2017).

<https://www.burmalink.org/position-statement-current-political-development-assistance-refugees/>

Karen Student Network Group (KSNG). 'Position of Karen Student Network Group on Repatriation' (June 20, 2017). <https://www.burmalink.org/position-karen-student-network-group-repatriation-june-20-2017/>

Karen Community Based Organizations (KCBO). 'Karen Community Based Organizations' Position on Refugees' Return to Burma' (September 11, 2012).

<http://womenofburma.org/Statement&Release/11-09-2012-Karen-Community-Based-Organizations-Position-on-Refugees-Return-to-Burma-position-paper.pdf>

Additional resources

Burma Link, Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), and Burma Partnership. 'Invisible Lives: The Untold Story of Displacement Cycle in Burma' (August 2016).
<https://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/FINAL-Eng-IDP-Report.pdf>

Burma Link and Burma Partnership. 'Briefing Paper: Voices of Refugees – Situation of Burma's Refugees Along the Thailand-Burma Border' (April 27, 2015).
<https://www.burmalink.org/briefing-paper-voices-of-refugees-situation-of-burmas-refugees-along-the-thailand-burma-border/>

Burma Link. 'Thailand-Burma Border: Overview' (updated October 6, 2016).
<https://www.burmalink.org/background/thailand-burma-border/overview/>

Burma Link. 'Not Safe for the Refugees to Return': Karen Students Release Their Position on Repatriation' (June 22, 2017)
<https://www.burmalink.org/not-safe-refugees-return-karen-students-release-position-repatriation/>

Progressive Voice (PV). 'Where Do We Go from Here? A snapshot of Recent Development for Refugees Along the Thailand-Myanmar Border' (December 2016).
http://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Refugee-Briefer-2016-FINAL_eng.pdf

Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF). 'As Conflict Escalates in Shan State, Aid Must Not Be Cut Off to Shan-Thai Border Refugees' (August 30, 2017).
<https://www.burmalink.org/conflict-escalates-shan-state-aid-must-not-cut-off-shan-thai-border-refugees/>

The Border Consortium (TBC). '2016 Annual Report' (2017).
<http://www.theborderconsortium.org/media/80489/2016-annual-report-jan-dec.pdf>

The Border Consortium (TBC). 'Refugee and IDP Camp Populations' *Map* (July 2017).
<http://www.theborderconsortium.org/media/84802/2017-07-jul-map-tbc-unhcr.pdf>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 'Strategic Roadmap for Voluntary Repatriation: Refugees from Myanmar in Thailand 2015-2017' (January 2017).
<http://data.unhcr.org/thailand/documents.php?page=1&view=grid&Org%5B%5D=3&WG%5B%5D=3&Type%5B%5D=17>

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

Burma Link, Karen Student Network Group, and Karen Youth Organisation. "Recognise Us: Refugee Youth on the Thailand-Burma Border" (May 2017).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CB5YZeCsJA&t=7s>

Burma Link, Karen Student Network Group, and Karen Youth Organisation. 'Unrecognized Leaders: Tomorrow's Hope (English version)' (February 22, 2017).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXTZSzm_II&t=1501s

Burma Link. "'We Don't Want to Go Back': Refugee on the Thailand-Burma Border' (August 14, 2013).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJbGlaijqTE&t=86s>

Burma Link and Burma Partnership. 'From Refugees to IDPs: Untold Story of Displacement Cycle in Burma' (June 20, 2016).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuK1JOyjugo&t=45s>

Burma Partnership. 'Nothing About Us Without Us' (December 10, 2012).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOW07BsBdrM>

Karen News. 'Displaced Karen Protest to get Burma army out of their land' (May 24, 2017).

<https://vimeo.com/channels/205092/218727523>

Karen News. 'Karen Refugees: Homeland still not safe, camps need support' (June 20, 2017).

<https://vimeo.com/channels/205092/222309609>

ABOUT BURMA LINK

Burma Link advocates for the rights of Burma's marginalized ethnic nationalities and displaced conflict-affected communities. Burma Link particularly focuses on amplifying the voices of disempowered and disenfranchised populations along the Thailand-Burma border.



GET IN TOUCH

Burma Link website: <https://www.burmalink.org/>

Burma Link on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/burmalink>

Burma Link on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/burmalink>

Contact us at office@burmalink.org