

Burma Link Annual Report 2017



Photo: KSNG

**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

Burma Link is a 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 Organisations (CBOs) and groups that represent them, are heard in Burma's reform process. We work in collaboration with numerous ethnic, refugee, women, capacity building, human rights, media, and political and armed organisations that represent various ethnicities and envision a Federal Union of Burma.

History and Introduction

This report describes the activities and key achievements of Burma Link during the year 2017.

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 unlawful associations in Burma and those led by refugees in the camps in Thailand, it has not been possible to register Burma Link in Burma or in Thailand.

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 Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) that work towards a Federal Union of Burma.



Burma Link continues to advocate for all parties to uphold and respect the voices and rights of Burma's displaced ethnic populations. In February 2017, Burma Link, the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG) and the Karen Youth Organisation (KYO) launched a new documentary titled, [“Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow's Hope: Raising the Voices of Forgotten Youth”](#) in a press conference in Yangon. The documentary amplifies the voices of displaced ethnic youth who live on the Thailand-Burma border, highlighting their calls for inclusion in political processes and recognition of refugee education

2017 Key Events

December

Burma Link publishes an [infographic briefer](#) about the Karen IDP camp Ei Tu Hta, which was cut off from long-standing international food aid in October 2017.

December

Burma Link publishes a detailed [map of refugee and IDP camps](#) along the Thailand-Burma border.

September

Burma Link initiates the [“Keep Supporting” Campaign](#) to encourage international actors to keep supporting refugees and IDPs along the Thailand-Burma border.

June

Burma Link publishes the training module [“Empowered Life and Leadership Skills \(ELLS\)”](#) freely available online and at Curriculum Project in Mae Sot, Thailand.

May

Burma Link, KSNG, and KYO publish the advocacy video [“Recognise Us”](#) online. The video is presented at a CCSDPT meeting in Bangkok, where Burma Link facilitates the participation of KSNG, funded by Right to Play and CCSDPT.

February

Burma Link, KSNG, and KYO launch the documentary film [“Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow’s Hope”](#) in a press conference in Yangon, supported by Right to Play and APRRN.

certificates. The advocacy and outreach for the documentary was supported by Right to Play and Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), and the launch was widely featured in international and local media. We also published a short version of the full documentary [“Recognise Us”](#) amplifying the key advocacy messages of the refugee youth. The video was also presented in the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) meeting in Bangkok in May 2017, where Burma Link facilitated the active participation of KSNG leadership. These youth representatives were the first young refugees to attend and speak in such a high-level meeting in Thailand since the camps were set up in 1984.

In December 2017, Burma Link published an [infographic briefer](#) about the isolated and remote Karen Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp Ei Tu Hta, which was cut off from long-standing international food aid in October 2017. The briefer was part of Burma Link’s [“Keep Supporting” Campaign](#), highlighting the urgent need for continuing the support for refugees and IDPs. The briefer presents both information about the camp and voices of Ei Tu Hta camp leadership. It provides an overview of the camp’s history and demographics as well as the current situation regarding food and water supplies, health and education services, and obstacles to return.

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 film makers. 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 other severe human rights violations 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 in eastern Burma alone. As the military has exerted repressive 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 – particularly Kachin and Northern Shan States – and increasing militarisation in ceasefire areas continue. Initial ceasefires have proven to be fragile and are 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 root causes of the conflict that address the political demands of ethnic resistance groups, 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 EAOs are widely 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.

More than 600,000 remain internally displaced due to conflict and violence, most of them in southeast Burma. Hundreds of thousands have also fled conflict and persecution to neighbouring Thailand, where nearly 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 the 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 (NLD) landslide victory in the November 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 2015. While 2017 saw a slight decrease in violations as reported by the Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma (ND-Burma) based in Thailand, the network attributed the result to increasing access restrictions and security concerns rather than actual improvement in the rights situation. The dire human rights situation was clearly demonstrated by the crisis in Arakan (Rakhine) State, where over 600,000 Rohingyas fled the large scale 'clearance operations' by government security forces to Bangladesh between August and December 2017, igniting an unprecedented international response including the UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) report concluding that the violations indicate the "very likely" commission of crimes against humanity. Rohingya survivors have spoken of horrific abuses including mass killings and rape, and Human Rights Watch revealed that at least 354 Rohingya villages were burnt down.

Serious violations by the Burma Army have continued in all ethnic areas for decades – albeit with less international attention than the crisis in Arakan. In 2017, conflict and violations continued particularly Kachin and northern Shan States, where Burma Army also used fighter jets and helicopter gunships against the EAOs, and thousands were newly displaced. In March 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar [Burma], Ms. Yanghee Lee, reported that there has been an increase in the frequency and intensity of clashes between the Burma Army and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) since October 2017. Clashes also continued between the Burma Army and numerous other EAOs, for example the NCA-signatory Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS). At the end of the year 2017, Burma Government barred Ms. Yanghee Lee from visiting the country and withdrew cooperation with her for the rest of her tenure. The government also continued to dismiss reports of serious violations as well as to block entry to the UN fact finding mission, which had been established in March 2017 and mandated to address abuses in Arakan as well as Shan and Kachin States.

The 2008 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, the 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 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 stake holders
- 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.

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

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 of 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, and about 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 2017

GOAL (1) Help Burma’s marginalised ethnic and displaced people reach out and have their voices heard	
Goal	Activity/Outcome
1.1. Publish voices of the people of Burma on Burma Link’s website	Published 15 stories/interviews with ethnic and displaced people of Burma from diverse backgrounds, including EAO leaders, CSO leaders from women/environmental/aid/student/legal/health organisations, refugees, and IDPs. In addition, interviews were published as part of two interviewing series: (1) Unrecognised Leaders documentary interviews and (2) Protracted Displacement project.
1.2. Broaden the audience and reach for voices of the people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published voices on our English website, for which our audience has steadily increased (> 600 visits per day in 2016, > 1,000 visits per day in 2017). Continued distributing the book of life stories “Lives on the Line,” which is available for purchasing in Mae Sot, Thailand, and in book shops in Burma. 60 copies were distributed free of charge to Karen communities inside Burma in collaboration with Karen CBOs.
1.3. Undertake projects that let the voices of the people be heard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued the interviewing and storytelling project throughout the year. Published a joint refugee youth documentary with KSNB and KYO in English and Burmese. Published a short version of the documentary summarising the key recommendations of refugee youth. Started publishing “Protracted Displacement” interviewing series online. Undertook social media campaigns marking international days such as the World Day of Social Justice and the World Day of Indigenous People.
1.4. Manage Agents of Change Leadership Program	Published the 3-day Empowered Life and Leadership Skills (ELLS) course online. The module was also made available at the Curriculum Project in Mae Sot, and shared in English and Burmese to a variety of local and regional CSOs and NGOs.
GOAL (2) Help the world reach in and understand the dynamics in Burma’s ethnic areas and on the Thailand-Burma border	
Goal	Activity/Outcome
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. We provided monthly peace and conflict updates throughout the year, available on our website .
2.2. Broaden international audience and reach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The English website average audience was over 1,000 visits per day for the year 2017, according to conservative <i>Awstats</i>. We continued publishing electronic English newsletters until November 2017 when the

	<p>limit to use Mail Chimp freely was exceeded (>2,000 subscribers) and we were unable to continue using the software.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burma Link’s English Facebook page had 6,412 followers by April 11, 2018. • Burma Link’s Twitter had over 2,988 followers by April 11, 2018.
<p>GOAL (3) Help the people of Burma understand the dynamics in Burma’s ethnic areas and on the Thailand-Burma border</p>	
Goal	Activity/Outcome
3.1. Provide local actors with easy access to information on Burma Link’s website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burma Link’s Burmese website provides local actors with a host of background information on the situation in Burma and on the Thailand-Burma border as well as a comprehensive collection of resources. • The Burmese website was re-arranged in January 2017 to feature voices of the people and background information. • Continued selling “Lives on the Line” in Burmese in book shops inside Burma.
3.2. Broaden Burmese audience and reach	Burma Link’s Burmese Facebook page had 3,734 followers by April 11, 2018. We have not been able to continue sharing information in Burmese since April 2017 due to lack of resources.
<p>GOAL (4) Advocacy and influence on policy-making</p>	
4.1. Publication and advocacy about IDPs and/or refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published the joint refugee youth documentary with KSNG and KYO in English and Burmese. • Launched the documentary in a press conference in Rangoon on February 22. • The documentary was featured in at least 2 English and 4 Burmese language media. • Worked with KYO and KSNG to arrange briefings and meetings in Rangoon with a variety of student and political activist groups regarding the refugee youth/education situation on the border. • From September to December, we undertook the “Keep Supporting” campaign, urging international actors to continue to support displaced populations along the Thailand-Burma border, through publications including interviews and stories as well as a factsheet and an infographic briefer.
4.2. Publishing statements/op-eds on current issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published statements in collaboration with CSO and NGO groups working towards free Burma. • Published op-eds in Asia Times, DVB, and The Irrawaddy. • Assisted a number of ethnic organisations based on the border to publish statements and open letters.
4.3. Influencing through networking and cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated and facilitated the participation of the KSNG in the CCSDPT meeting in Bangkok in May. • Participated in the APRRN Southeast Asia Working Group strategy meeting in Bangkok in May, briefing regional actors about the displacement situation along the border. • Assisted CBOs with writing grant proposals.

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 and issue-focused interviews, particularly with ethnic and women leaders. Stories and issue-focused interviews are available on the website: <http://www.burmalink.org/voices/>.

During the year 2017, we published altogether 28 stories and interviews on our English website. The stories profiled people from various backgrounds, including refugees and IDPs, EAO leaders, and representatives from various CSOs. Ethnicities of the people included Karen, Karenni, Mon, Kachin, Arakanese (Rakhine), and Ta'ang (Palaung), Naga, and Shan.

Top interviews and stories for 2017

1. 'Take Effective Action...Leading to the Emergence of an International Criminal Tribunal for Burma': Aung Htoo, Founder of Legal Aid Network

Published July 17, 2018



July 17, 2017, was the 15th Anniversary of the Rome Statute, which saw the establishment of the International Criminal Court and now marks the World Day for International Justice. In this exclusive interview with Burma Link, Aung Htoo – Human Rights Lawyer and the Founder of Legal Aid Network (LAN) – discusses the human rights situation in Burma and how the country

should approach justice and national reconciliation.

“National authorities in Burma – be they the ruling Burma military leaders as well the NLD government – are manifestly failing to protect their people and ethnic nationalities from genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The impunity – which has been profoundly prevailing particularly in ethnic states – negatively resulted in denial of the Rule of Law which has caused primary obstructions for peace, justice, freedom and development of the entire society.”

- Read the full interview: <https://www.burmalink.org/emergence-international-criminal-tribunal-burma-aung-htoo/>

2. '[NCA] Is Not Something That Will Benefit the Ethnic Groups and Our Struggle': Karen Major General Nerdah Bo Mya Urges Ethnic Leaders to Stay Away from the 'Useless' Deal

Published October 31, 2017



The second anniversary of the 'Nationwide' Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was held on October 15 2017 in Naypyidaw. Whilst the signing of the NCA in 2015 was supposed to be the focal point of the Thein Sein Government's peace process, only eight EAOs – KNU, RCSS/SSA-S, DKBA, KNU/KNLA-PC, ALP, CNF, PNLO and the ABSDF – signed the pact. Many powerful EAOs refused to sign the non-inclusive deal. In this exclusive and timely interview with Burma Link, the Major General Nerdah Bo Mya, the head of the KNDO (Karen National Defence Organisation – under the

KNU), discusses his views regarding the NCA and how to move forward to find sustainable solutions for peace and democracy.

“You come to the NCA you have to come as a prisoner. You say ‘okay now I surrender. I join you, I come and join the NCA because what I have done in the past and what I did in the past is all wrong. I regret. I come back to you. Please receive me. You are the master and you are my savior. I am your servant and now I am finished you can take my weapons.’”

- Read the full interview: <https://www.burmalink.org/nca-not-something-will-benefit-ethnic-groups-struggle-karen-major-general-nerdah-bo-mya-urges-ethnic-leaders-stay-away-useless-de/>

3. 'Women Working in Rural Areas ... Need to Be Given Bigger Platforms to Promote Sustainable Development in Their Communities': Shan Women's Action Network

Published October 13, 2017



Founded in 1999, Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) has been advocating for gender equality and justice for women in Shan State for nearly two decades. Composed of a network of women working from Shan State and the Thailand-Burma border, the group is community-based and works closely with women and children. SWAN also works to promote social and political change in Burma

and is a founding member of the Women's League of Burma (WLB).

“Despite ceasefires, the Burma Army continues to wage violence with impunity. In June 2014, Burma signed the UK-sponsored Declaration of Commitment to end sexual violence in conflict but efforts to halt military assault against women has been largely inadequate as soldier's getaway with war crimes.

Humanitarian assistance is desperately needed as lives are at risk with internal displacement on the rise and many cases of violence going unreported. SWAN also calls for the international community to put pressure on the Burmese Government to seek the protection and advancement of rural women.”

- Read the full interview: <https://www.burmalink.org/women-working-rural-areas-need-given-bigger-platforms-promote-sustainable-development-communities-shan-womens-action-network/>

Interview series

Protracted Displacement

Burma Link’s longitudinal interviewing project “Protracted Displacement” provides a snapshot into lives of Burma’s displaced individuals. Beginning in December 2016, and covering a period of about 18 months, Burma Link follows the lives of a few individuals in diverse protracted displacement situations along the Thailand-Burma border. The information also feeds into a research project “Protected rather than protracted-Strengthening refugees and peace” by a German independent non-profit organisation Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).

- The interview series is available here: <https://www.burmalink.org/category/voices/protracted-displacement/>

Unrecognised Leaders

This interview series was conducted as part of the joint documentary “Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow’s Hope” by Burma Link, KSNG, and KYO. The series is meant to give more in depth understanding into the situation of young ethnic refugees from Burma as well as refugee advocacy and Burma’s political situation.

- The 11-interview series is available here: <https://www.burmalink.org/category/voices/unrecognised-leaders-interviews/>

Lives on the Line



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 continues to be sold in Mae Sot and in book shops across Burma. The English book is also being sold as a print and electronic copy via Lulu.com and Amazon.com. In addition, 60 Burmese

language copies were distributed freely in Karen State in collaboration with Karen CSOs. Free copies were also distributed to numerous CSOs and other partners.

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 IDPs in eastern Burma.

Joint refugee youth documentary film



On February 22, Burma Link, KSNG and KYO launched a new documentary titled, [“Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow’s Hope: Raising the Voices of Forgotten Youth”](#) in a press conference in Yangon.

The documentary amplifies the voices of displaced ethnic youth who live on the Thailand-Burma border, highlighting their calls for inclusion in political processes and recognition of refugee

education certificates. The advocacy and outreach for the documentary was supported by Right to Play and APRRN, and the launch was featured in numerous international and local media. The launch was also accompanied by one week of briefings and meetings with a variety of CSOs and activists in Yangon. Handouts included postcards with key recommendations issued by the youth.

We also published a short version of the full documentary [“Recognise Us”](#) amplifying the key advocacy messages of the refugee youth. The video was presented in the CCSDPT meeting in Bangkok in May, where Burma Link facilitated the active participation of KSNG leadership. These youth representatives were the first young refugees to attend and speak in such a high-level meeting in Thailand since the camps were set up in 1984. The advocacy video was viewed over 17,000 times on Facebook.

We also created a website for the documentary, available here: <http://voicesofyouth.burmalink.org/>

Watch the full documentary “Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow’s Hope: Raising the Voices of Forgotten Youth” on YouTube

- English: <https://youtu.be/iXTZSzrm II>
- Burmese: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7jCcaGilHo&t>

Press Release: Refugee Youth Must Have the Opportunity to Participate in Burma’s Transition

- English (PDF): <http://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Press-Release-English-Feb22.pdf>
- Burmese (PDF): <http://burmese.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Press-Release-Burmese-FINAL.pdf>

The short advocacy video “Recognise Us”

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

Additional screenings have so far been arranged by Burma Link and partners in Youth Forum in Mae La refugee camp, Mae Sot and Bangkok, Thailand; Karen youth camp, Karen State, Burma; Hong Kong University, Hong Kong; Aarhus University, Denmark; and Amnesty International, Bath, UK. Pictures from some of the past screenings are available here: <http://voicesofyouth.burmalink.org/past-screenings/>



Infographic briefer about the Ei Tu Hta Karen IDP Camp



On December 21, 2017, Burma Link published an infographic briefer about the Karen IDP camp Ei Tu Hta, which was cut off from long-standing international food aid in October 2017. The briefer was part of Burma Link’s “Keep Supporting” Campaign, highlighting the urgent need for continuing the support for the IDPs. The briefer presents both information about the camp and voices of Ei Tu Hta camp leadership. It provides an overview of the camp’s history and demographics as well as the current situation regarding food and water supplies, health and education services, and obstacles to return.

- Download (PDF) the briefer in English [here](https://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ei-Tu-Hta-infographic-briefer.pdf): <https://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ei-Tu-Hta-infographic-briefer.pdf>

Information Sharing and Media

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.

English website

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.

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.

The English website average audience was over 1,000 visits per day for the year 2017, according to conservative *Awstats*.

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 page had 6,412 followers by April 11, 2018.

- Facebook (Burmese)

Burma Link's Burmese Facebook page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/burmalinkburmese> . The page had 3,734 followers by April 11, 2018.

- Twitter

Burma Link's Twitter account can be accessed at <https://twitter.com/burmalink>. The account had over 2,988 followers by April 11, 2018.

- YouTube

Burma Link's YouTube account can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/user/burmalink>. The account had 57 subscribers by April 11, 2018.

- E-newsletter

Burma Link published an e-newsletter from September 2016 until October 2017. We reached the free limit to use Mail Chimp (> 2,000 subscribers) in November 2017 and have been unable to continue using the software.

Social media campaigns

During the year, Burma Link initiated a number of campaigns to draw attention to the plight of Burma's ethnic and displaced people.

Keep Supporting Displaced Populations Along the Thailand-Burma/Myanmar Border

In September, Burma Link launched the "[Keep Supporting](#)" Campaign, highlighting the urgent need to continue to support refugees and IDPs along the Thailand-Burma border. The campaign was initiated at a time when international support for IDPs in the southeast was set to stop (October 2017). The campaign was set up to support the appeals of local organisations in the crisis, with weekly alternating themes bringing essential information and resources, calling for inclusive planning and sustainable solutions, and amplifying the voices of IDPs and refugees and organisations that represent them. The campaign 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.

#KeepSupporting #CrossBorderAid #NotSafeToReturn

- Read more on the website: <https://www.burmalink.org/keep-supporting>
- Download the campaign memo and fact sheet (PDF): <https://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Keep-supporting-IDPs-refugees-factsheet.pdf>

Other campaigns

World Indigenous People's Day

To mark the World Indigenous People's Day (August 9), Burma Link promoted the voices of Burma's indigenous peoples every day of the week, primarily via Facebook and Twitter. The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994, to promote the rights of indigenous peoples around the globe.

#WeAreIndigenous #UN4indigenous

- Read messages from different ethnic leaders on the website:
<https://www.burmalink.org/ethnic-people-speak>

World Day for International Justice

To mark the 15th Anniversary of the Rome Statute (July 17), which saw the establishment of the International Criminal Court and now marks the World Day for International Justice, Burma Link undertook a week long social media campaign “Week for Justice.” The campaign drew attention to the violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, which continue to occur in Burma on a daily basis, primarily committed by the Burma Army. The campaign reflected on four different themes, each representing widespread and systemic rights violations experienced by ethnic people in Burma and served as a reminder that justice has yet to be delivered in Burma for those victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

#justicematters #weekforjustice

Peace and Conflict Updates

To support easy access to information on the peace process and the conflict and displacement situation in Burma, Burma Link continued to centralise the information and publish monthly updates based on reports by local and international media and organisations.

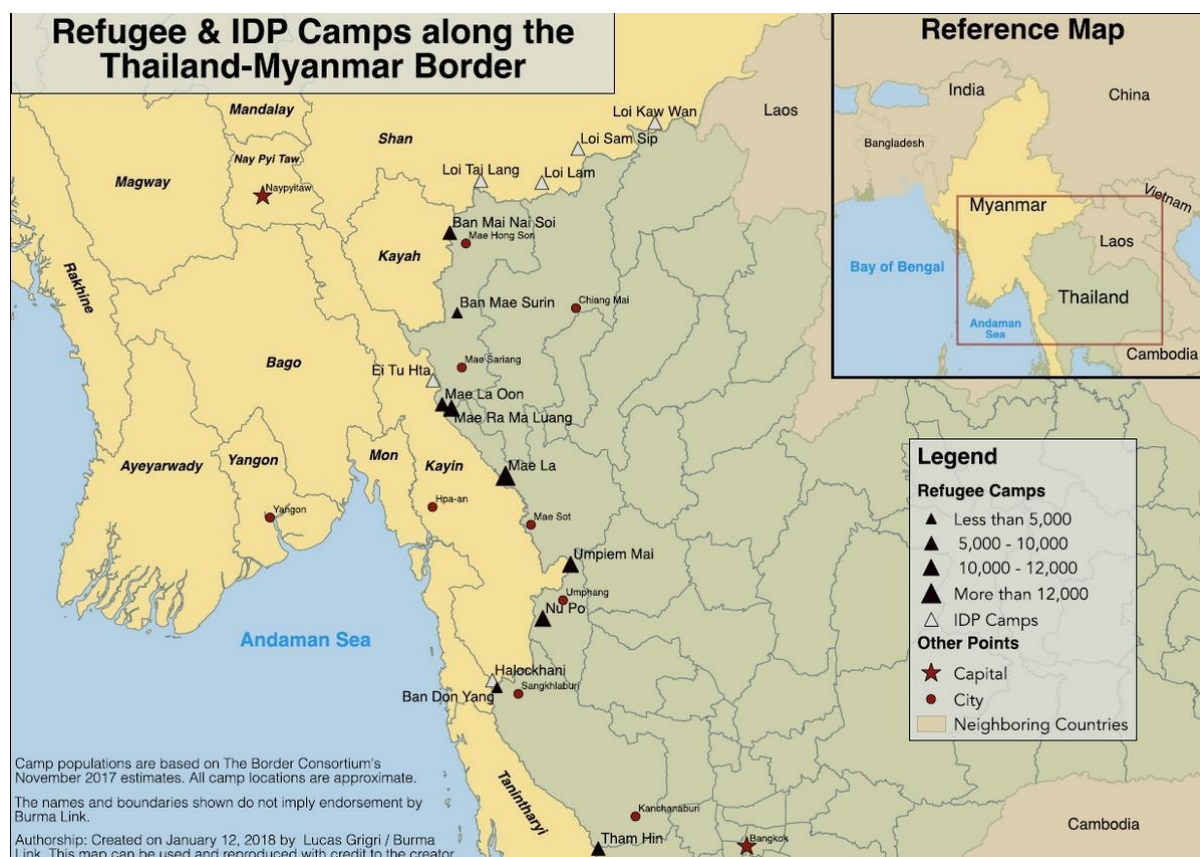
- Monthly updates: <https://www.burmalink.org/peace-conflict-updates/>
- Peace process overview: <https://www.burmalink.org/peace-process-overview/>

Burma/Myanmar Media Monitoring Database

The Burma/Myanmar Media Monitoring Database focuses on ethnic issues, particularly conflict, displacement, human rights violations, and related topics. Since May 2016, Burma Link has systematically documented publications by local and national news sources, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and CBOs to a structured database. We continued the monitoring throughout the year 2017, making the database public in the beginning of the year 2018. The database provides day-by-day news monitoring, and represents an extensive source of information and resources that can contribute to further news reporting, academic studies or independent research on Burma issues.

- The database is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BehIVcUaVciJMR6mB2t2n0ki4W8y0oeJQVU-tHJB6WU/edit#gid=124430495>

Map of refugee and IDP camps along the Thailand-Burma/Myanmar border



In December, we published a new map of refugee and IDP camps along the Thailand-Burma/Myanmar border created by Lucas Grigri / Burma Link. This map can be freely used and reproduced with credit to the author.

- Download the full-size map (PDF) here: <http://bit.ly/2ErnWGI>

Burma Link in other media

The New York Times links to Burma Link's website

In November, The New York Times linked back to Burma Link's website, which resulted in dozens of reproductions and new backlinks to our website.

Paddock, R. C. (2017). *Myanmar General's Purge of Rohingya Lifts His Popular Support*. The New York Times [online], November 26, 2017. Available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/26/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-min-aung-hlaing.html>

The article links to "History of Armed Opposition" within the background information on our website. The page is available here: <https://www.burmalink.org/background/burma/dynamics-of-ethnic-conflict/history-of-armed-opposition/>

Op-eds

Burma Link's staff published three op-eds in local and regional media during the year 2017.

Zieger, L. and Tistchenko, C. (2017). *Myanmar's forgotten and forsaken war victims*. Asia Times [online], December 10, 2017. Available at <http://www.atimes.com/article/myanmars-forgotten-forsaken-war-victims/>.

Zieger, L. (2017). *Unrecognized and Forgotten: Refugee Youth in Burma's Transition*. The Irrawaddy [online], March 11, 2017. Available at <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/unrecognized-forgotten-refugee-youth-burmas-transition.html>.

Zieger, L. (2017). *Ethnic communities protest dams risking lives, cultures and environments*. Democratic Voice of Burma [online], March 17, 2017. Available at <http://www.dvb.no/analysis/ethnic-communities-rally-dams-threatening-lives-cultures-environments/74628>.

“Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow’s Hope” in media:

The documentary “Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow’s Hope” was featured in a number of English and Burmese language media. Several local media representatives were present at the launch, including TV and radio reporters. Below are links to all the media coverage that we have come across. It is likely that the launch was reported on TV and radio channels as well as print media that we had no access to inside Burma.

Articles:

Su Myat Mon / Frontier Myanmar (February 22). *IDP students cut off from higher education*. <http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/idp-students-cut-off-from-higher-education>

MITV News (February 22). *Launching Documentary: “Raising The Voices Of Forgotten Youth”*. <http://www.myanmarinternationaltv.com/news/launching-documentary-%E2%80%9Craising-voices-forgotten-youth%E2%80%9D>

KIC News (February 23). *နယ်စပ်ဒုက္ခသည်စခန်းများရှိ ပညာရေးစနစ်ကို အသိအမှတ်ပြုရန် KSNG ပြောဆို*. <http://kicnews.org/2017/02/%E1%80%94%E1%80%9A%E1%80%B9%E1%80%85%E1%80%95%E1%80%B9%E1%80%92%E1%80%AF%E1%80%80%E1%81%A1%E1%80%9E%E1%80%8A%E1%80%B9%E1%80%85%E1%80%81%E1%80%94%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B8%E1%80%99%E1%80%BA%E1%80%AC%E1%80%B8/>

Articles/radio:

RFA (February 22). *ကရင်လူငယ်တွေ ပညာရေး နှိမ်ချဆက်ဆံခံနေရ*. <http://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/karen-students-education-in-camp-02222017215148.html>

TV / video:

Kamayut Media (February 23).

<https://www.facebook.com/kamayutmedia/videos/1711520322198490/>

DVB Youth Voice (February 24).

<https://www.facebook.com/DVBYouthVoice/videos/1456370274396386/>

Press release:

The press release was published also at least by:

Progressive Voice (English version) – <http://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2017/02/22/refugee-youth-must-have-the-opportunity-to-participate-in-burmas-transition/>

Progressive Voice (Burmese version) – <http://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2017/02/22/refugee-youth-must-have-the-opportunity-to-participate-in-burmas-transition-burmese-version/>

Burma Campaign UK (English version) – <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/refugee-youth-must-have-the-opportunity-to-participate-in-burmas-transition-burma-link/>

Capacity building and networking

In 2017, we continued to work in close collaboration with local and regional actors. We assisted a number of ethnic CBOs with writing grant proposals, statements, and open letters. We worked in particularly close collaboration with the KSNG and KYO with refugee youth advocacy (see above).

The “Empowered Life and Leadership Skills (ELLS)” training module

In May, we published the 3-day Empowered Life and Leadership Skills (ELLS) course online. The module was also made available at the Curriculum Project in Mae Sot, and it has been shared in English and Burmese with a variety of local and regional CSOs and NGOs. The ELLS training module was developed as part of Burma Link’s Agents of Change (AOC) project. The 3/4-day ELLS training aims at developing essential life and leadership skills such as confidence, honesty and courage, responsible citizenship, and the ability to effectively deal with others. The materials were developed for educated youth from Burma, but could be adjusted to other teaching environments.

- Download all training materials as a zip file here: <https://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ELLS-all-training-materials.zip>

APRRN membership

Burma Link has been a member of APRRN since 2016. In 2017, we continued to actively participate in the network. In May, Burma Link participated in the APRRN Southeast Asia Working Group strategy meeting in Bangkok, briefing APRRN members and other regional actors about the situation on the border. APRRN also featured the quote of Leena Zieger, Burma Link founder and current International Coordinator in their Annual Report for 2016 (see below).

Being a member of APRRN has opened numerous otherwise unattainable opportunities for us to build our capacity and network with refugee rights organisations and passionate change makers across the region; we've been able to widen our horizons to a more regional perspective, access valuable training opportunities, and greatly build our capacity as a refugee rights advocacy organisation. Importantly, we have also been able to share this increased capacity with local refugee-led organisations to enable, encourage, and empower them to self-advocate. When possible in our highly sensitive and challenging security context, APRRN has opened doors and provided us with resources to realise the aspirations of refugees to travel to events and meetings and advocate for causes that are important for them. We are truly thankful not only for the opportunities for networking and growth that APRRN membership has provided our organisation with, but also for all the support and guidance that has greatly benefited us and the refugee-led organisations we work with. We look forward to working with APRRN members in the future and wholeheartedly recommend APRRN membership to organisations and individuals passionate about refugee rights advocacy.

Leena Zieger
International Coordinator, Burma Link

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Identity

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:	http://www.burmalink.org/
English Facebook:	https://www.facebook.com/burmalink
Twitter:	https://twitter.com/burmalink

The logo for Burma Link, featuring the words "BURMA LINK" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font on a red, rounded rectangular background.

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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