

ASYLUM OFFICER TRAINING MATERIALS RELEASED

March, 2026

Free Burma Society filed a FOIA request with US-CIS, asking for documents given to asylum officers, about Burma. US-CIS ignored the request, so Free Burma filed a Complaint in federal court. Case No. 25-2946 [TJK]

US-CIS then released 219 pages, attached hereto

U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services



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Myanmar

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR00001.ZNK
Date:	7 December 1999
Subject:	Burma (Myanmar): Information on Rohingya refugees
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Myanmar / Burma / Rohingya / Bangladesh / Arakan / Rakhine / Exodus / Refugee / Repatriation / SLORC / Muslim /

Query:

Information on Rohingya refugees in Burma

Response:

Background

The Rohingya people are of Muslim descent and are native to the northern Arakan region of Burma, which borders Bangladesh. The name Rohingya originates from the name "Rohang" or "Rohan" given to the Arakan region during the ninth and tenth centuries. Another group, the Rakhine people, reside in the same area of Burma and are the ethnic majority, with a Hindu and Mongol background. (Human Rights Watch, 1996)

The Rohingyas have suffered a history of abuse, and since World War II have been fighting for recognition as a distinct ethnic group as well as an independent state. "By 1947, the Rohingyas had formed an army and had approached President Jinnah of the newly created Pakistan to ask him to incorporate northern Arakan into East Pakistan (Bangladesh)." (Human Rights Watch, 1996) Many observers speculate that it was this disloyal action by the Rohingyas that led to the group's present problems with the government because the state still views the Rohingyas as untrustworthy. (Smith, 1993)

The First Exodus

Shortly after the military coup in 1962, Rohingyas assert that the new government took measures to restrict their freedom and, ultimately, drive the group out of the country. For example, in the mid-1970s, Burma initiated the Emergency Immigration Act, requiring all citizens to possess National Registration Certificates (NRCs). However, Rohingyas were only given Foreign Registration Cards (FRCs), which many employers and local authorities did not accept. (Human Rights Watch, 1996)

In 1977, the Rohingyas experienced even greater obstacles. The government's Nagamin (Dragon King) program, aimed at taking action against foreigners, disintegrated into attacks on Rohingyas from both the army and the ethnic majority in Arakan, the Rakhines. By May

1978, over 200,000 Rohingyas fled over the border to Bangladesh. However, because of difficult conditions in Bangladesh, nearly all Rohingya refugees returned to Burma by 1979. (Burma Issues, 1998)

The 1991-92 Exodus

When the current military government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took power in 1988, Burma's policy toward the Rohingyas changed very little. For example, under the 1982 Citizenship Law, a person must establish Burmese ancestry back to 1823 in order to be considered a citizen. Therefore, most Rohingyas along with other ethnic minorities are not able to qualify as citizens, and are denied many basic rights including access to education and even freedom of movement. (Islam, 30 July 1999)

The SLORC-dominated government continued to support such anti-Rohingya policies; however, the Rohingyas were permitted to participate in the 1990 elections. In fact, the Rohingyas were represented by two parties that won 80 percent of the vote in their districts. Unfortunately, the SLORC refused to relinquish its power. Many scholars believe that the subsequent 'attack' on the Rohingya populace was an effort by the SLORC to unite angry citizens against a common enemy and distract attention from the party's unwillingness to give up its position in the government. (Human Rights Watch, 1996)

In 1991 and 1992, the Rohingyas experienced widespread repression and abuse from security forces posted in northern Arakan. Once again, Rohingya refugees began flooding over the border to Bangladesh to escape human rights abuse, and by March 1992, 260,000 Burmese Muslims were living in refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar. (Carey, 1997) The refugees claimed that many ethnic minorities in the Rakhine State had been subjected to extrajudicial executions, rape, religious persecution and torture by the military. In addition, the Rohingyas were forced to work, unpaid, for security forces, building bridges, roads and barracks, digging fish and prawn ponds, and laboring as porters. (Amnesty International, 1997)

Repatriation

On April 28, 1992, the governments of Burma and Bangladesh signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and the SLORC agreed to accept the return of all refugees that could establish a "bona fide residence" in Burma and that the repatriation would be safe and voluntary. However, during the 1992-93 period in particular, the government of Bangladesh used force, withheld rations, imprisoned and often beat or threatened to beat refugees who did not agree to return. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) withdrew from all camps in protest of the abuse. In 1993 Bangladesh and Burma both signed an agreement with UNHCR, but, by that time, nearly 50,000 refugees had been forcibly repatriated. (Human Rights Watch, 1996)

The repatriation program was scheduled to end in December 1995, but natural disasters, political unrest and strikes, in conjunction with many refugees' reluctance to return home and delays by Burma in clearing refugees for return, slowed the process considerably, leaving more than 35,000 refugees still in camps. In addition, reports began to circulate that conditions in the Arakan State had not changed, and ethnic minorities still faced discrimination and persecution by the government because of their ethnicity. (Burma Issues, 1998)

According to a 1996 Human Rights Watch report,

Current Situation for Rohingyas in Burma

As of 1999, more than 21,000 Burmese Muslims remain in refugee camps in Bangladesh and new refugees continue to arrive every day. Lionel Rosenblatt, President of Refugees International, testified in March before the House International Relations Committee that the situation in Burma has worsened; political repression and practices such as forced relocations, forced labor and arbitrary arrests have intensified, and nearly one million people

are internally displaced. Rosenblatt also discussed the Rohingya situation specifically, stating, "Although Bangladesh wants to close the camps where 21,000 Rohingyas remain, [Refugees International] recommends that the camps remain open because these refugees fear persecution if they return to Burma." (FNS, 9 March 1999)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC, including the World Wide Web.

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Myanmar

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR00002.bkk
Date:	August 17, 2000
Subject:	Chronology Of Burmese Major Opposition Groups
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Myanmar, Burma, opposition groups, military government, The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), The National Democratic League (NLD)

Query:

Please provide a chronology of Burmese major opposition groups.

Response:

The following research was completed in response to the request for a chronology of Burmese major opposition groups.

Burma's Fight for Independence from Britain

1906

The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was founded as the first organization to fight for Burma's independence and anti-British colonialism.

1936

The All Burma Students' Union (ABSU) was formed by and of Burmese student unions through the university level. The ABSU was led by Ba Hein and Aung San, also known as Bo Te Za (Bo, meaning, "Commander, Leader of a Force or Military Officer"). In 1941, Aung San was the General leading the Burma Independence Army (BIA)'s military unit under Japanese invasion. After Burma's independence in 1948, the ABSU remained a prominent student organization and was a founding member of The Freedom Bloc.

1939

The Communist Party of Burma (CPB), also known as The Burma Communist Party (BCP), was founded primarily as an underground insurgent organization, even though the CPB was later registered as a legal political party. The initial founders were Thakin Soe (Thakin meaning "Master"), Thakin Than Tun, A.N. Goshal, Thakin Hla Pe and Dr. Naag.

1939

The Freedom Bloc meaning "The Association of the Way Out" was founded in October 1939, to make Britain aware of Burma's rights to freedom. The organization was led by Dr. Ba Maw and merged the following organizations: Do Bama Asi Ayon, The Sinyetha Party and The All Burma Students' Union (ABSU).

1941

The Burma Independence Army (BIA) was formed and trained by the Japanese and had a core national group named Thirty Comrades, also known as Thirty Heroes. Aung San headed Thirty Comrades and the Comrade-in-Arms was Brigadier Ne Win.

1944

The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was founded as the military arm of the Burma Independence Army (BIA), and the first independent Burmese army. U Nu served as President and Vice President of The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League.

1945

The Patriotic Burmese Forces (PBF) was the new name given on May 30, 1945, to The Burma Independence Army (BIA), after Burmese forces led a Japanese uprising. The PBF disbanded when a new Burmese army was formed as part of The 5 Batalions of the Burma Rifles.

Burma's Fight for Ethnic and Religious Freedom

There are 7 States associated with ethnic groups in Burma: Shan, Kayins (Karen), Rakhines (Arakenese), Mons, Chins, KaChins and Kayahs.

1947

The Kayin (Karen) National Union (KNU) was founded in April 1947, and is the oldest ethnic insurgent group. The military arm of the KNU was The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). It's leader was General Bo Mya. Currently, the KNU leader is Saw Ba Thin. Historically, the Karens and Burmese were major rivals. In 1950, the KNU was pushed into the border areas of Thailand, eliminating Muslim insurgency groups, and reducing communist groups to opposition organizations. In the 1970's, the KNU was sometimes joined by The Mon National Defense Organization (MNDO) where many of its members, like KNU members, lived in Thailand.

1947

The Mon National Defense Organization (MNDO) was formed as the military arm to the Mon Freedom League, later known as The Mon United Front, and led by Nai Shwe Kyin and Nai Hla Maung (Maung meaning "younger brother"). The organization's aim was to establish an independent Mon-Karen State.

1947

General Aung San was assassinated with the help of his political rival, U Saw on July 19, 1947.

1948

On January 4, 1948, Burma gained independence from Britain and a multi party system was established. U Nu was elected Burma's Prime Minister through 1962.

1957

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), an ethnic rebel organization, was founded by

Saw Maw Reh. In the 1960's, the organization controlled most of the Kayah State. The organization has many factions.

1960

The Arakan National Liberation Party (ANLP) was founded as a Rakhine rebel organization. The party has many factions.

1960

The Burmese Communist Party (BCP) White Flag faction located in Pegu Yoma and the BCP associated with The Red Flag faction in the Rakhine state (formerly Arakan State) were Communist underground groups assimilated by the government.

1961

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) or Kachin Independence Army (KIA) was founded to promote Buddhism, and remained for some time, the largest and best organized armed ethnic opposition group in Burma.

Burma's Switch to a Single Party System: The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP)

1962

The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) or Lanzin, as the party is called in Burmese language, was formed as a result of a military coup on July 4, 1962, by General U Ne Win. From 1962 to 1988, the BSPP was the one legal party until the transfer of power to a multi party system.

1964

The Shan State Army (SSA) was the result of a merger between The Shan National United Front with The Shan State Independence Army (SSIA). The SSA was led by the Kokang Resistance Force. In 1972, a political arm of SSA was formed, namely, The Shan State Progress Party (SSPP). In the 1980's, the 2 organizations became rified based on loyalties to The Communist Party of Burma.

1970

The Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP), the largest Karenni (Kayah) group in the jungle, was a noncommunist group predicated on the 1875 treaty between Burmese kings and Britain. The military arm of the KNPP is The Karenni Liberation Army, which has clashed with The Burmese Communist Party (BCP); The Kayah New Land Revolutionary Council and The Karenni People's United Liberation Front. The KNU cooperated with The Karenni (Kayah) groups in the jungle.

1970

The Rohingya Patriotic Front was developed by the Muslims, who had supported Britain, which heightened Burmese suspicions of treason. Arakan was the underground home to many opposition parties, mainly the Burmese Communist Party (BCP). Factions to the Rohingya Patriotic Front were The Rohingya Solidarity Organization and its rival, The Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), headquartered in Bangladesh. In 1978, the government mounted a campaign against the Rohingya factions entitled, Ye The Ha and used the "Four Cuts" strategy to cut off rebel necessities. The campaign escalated from "King Dragon" to murder and rape of the Arkanese, destruction of mosques, and Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh.

1970

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) or Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and The Burmese Communist Party (BCP) cooperated in order to threaten government power. The cooperation effort stopped in 1980-1981 to fulfill regional KIO/KIA goals.

1970

The Shan State Army (SSA) and the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) cooperated to threaten the Burmese government. The SSA was involved in disagreements over narcotic trading and drugs, which caused the 1976 split from the BCP. A breakaway BCP faction was established and later returned to the SSA. Some cooperation still occurred through the early 1980's.

1973

The Wa National Army (WNA) which was headed by former Wa Chieftain Mahasang, who encouraged the Wa militants to fight leadership of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB).

A New Constitution and Change from Burma to The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma

1974

A new Constitution was adopted, and Burma became The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma.

1975

The National Democratic Front (NDF) was founded. The following major ethnic groups were a part of the NDF in the 1970's and 1980's: The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) or Kachin Independence Army (KIA); The Chin National Front (CNF); The Shan State Army (SSA); The Lahu State Army; The Karen National Union (KNU); The Kayan New Land Party (KNLP); The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP); Lahu National Organization (LNO); The New Mon State Party (NMSP); The Arakan Liberation Party (ALP); Palaung State Liberation Party; The Wa National Army (WNA) and the Pa-O National Organization. The party's President was Saw Maw Reh.

1980

Some insurgent groups that operated in the Kachin and Shan states in North and Northeast Burma were: The Burmese Communist Party (BCP); The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO); The Shan State Army (SSA); The Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA); The Shan United Army; The Third Chinese Irregular Forces; The Fifth Chinese Irregular Forces; The Shan State Volunteer; The Wa National Army (WNA) - Ma (Ma meaning "younger sister") Ha San Faction; The Wa National Army; The Ai Hsiao-shih Group; The A Bi Group; The Lahu State Army; The United Pa-O Organization; The Tai National Army; The Palaung State Liberation Organization; The Yang Hwe-Kang Group and The Karen National Union (KNU).

1980

The Arakan Liberation Organization (ALO) was organized by U Kyaw Hla, who in 1977 was accused of conspiracy against The Union of Burma and the military dictatorship. To avoid imprisonment, he escaped to Wankha, a Karen liberated area. In 1982, the armed wing of The ALO was established. In 1987, The ALO was reformed as The Muslim Liberation Organization of Burma (MLOB) to represent oppressed Muslims. The MLOB is the founder of The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and a member of The National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB).

1980

The People's Army was the military arm of The Burmese Communist Party (BCP). The group

floundered because of its short supply ammunition.

1980

The Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) was formed as a separatist organization heavily involved in the narcotics trade. Formerly, The Tangyan KKY, it was Shan State Army's (SSA's) rival in the Shan State. The leader of SURA was Mo Heng.

Burma's Switch to a Multi-Party System: The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) Military Government

1988

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), currently, The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), was a group of Generals who came into power on September 18, 1988 as a result of a coup. Until April 23, 1992, the SLORC was headed by Senior General Saw Maung, who was replaced by Brigadier General Than Shwe. Another SLORC leader was Brigadier General Khin Nyunt.

1988

The National Democratic League (NLD), was legally registered and formed by Aung Gyi, U Tin Oo and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (Daw meaning "Superior"). The NLD remains the main opposition party to the military controlled government. Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Burma's independence leader and retired Army General, Aung San, was elected Secretary General of the NLD on September 24, 1988. Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo were placed under house arrest on July 20 1989. On December 1989, U Tin Oo was sentenced to 3 years hard labor after a trial by a military tribunal. Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest on July 15, 1995.

1988

The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), a government ruling body, ended due to the call for mass demonstrations, "The Massacre of 8-8-88" and the resignation of General Ne Win. Demonstrators demanded democratic practices such as free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and a multi party system on September 26, 1988. The BSPP became The National Unity Party (NUP), a legally registered political party. U Sein Lwin replaced General Ne Win during additional turbulence, and when killings of protestors started, Dr. Maung Maung (Bo Nyana) replaced U Sein Lwin.

1988

The People's Democracy Party (PDP) was legally registered on October 4, 1988. The PDP was founded by Aung Than, the older brother of Aung San Suu Kyi's father. A week later, the PDP affiliated itself with The National Democratic League (NLD).

1988

The Graduates and Old Students' Democratic Association (GOSDA) was legally registered on October 10, 1988. Its objectives included fostering democratic and human rights.

1988

The Burma United Democratic Party (BUDP) was legally registered on October 11, 1988 and aimed to develop a government based on human rights and democracy.

1988

The Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) was legally registered on October 13, 1988 and

declared to develop a new constitution advocating democracy as an offshoot of The All Burma Federation of Students Union (ABFSU). The party was founded by ABFSU leaders Moe Thi Zun and Moe Hein, who became DPNS' General Secretary. The DPNS formed the League for Democratic Alliance (LDA) composed of 12 legal political parties. The DPNS also established The Democratic Front of the Union of Burma (DFUB) including 41 registered political parties. The DPNS became a major alliance with The National Democratic League (NLD) with branches in more than 250 townships and 1500 organizers. After an unsuccessful attempt to join SLORC, The DPNS went underground. SLORC imprisoned more than 300 DPNS members and Moe Hein was arrested on July 17, 1989.

1988

The People's Volunteer Organization (PVO) was legally registered on October 14, 1988 and aimed to develop a state with full democratic rights in a "disciplined and united manner."

1988

The Union of Burma Main Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (UBMAFPFL) was legally registered on October 18, 1988 and aimed to "foster among the people an eternal spirit that ...opposes fascism and dictatorship." The name of the UBMAFPFL was taken from The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). The UBMAFPFL's General Secretary, Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein, is the daughter of Than Tun, the General Secretary of The AFPFL. She was interrogated after being detained on June 16, 1989.

1988

The People's Student's Democratic Party (PSDP) was legally registered on October 21, 1988 and advocated coordination with political organizations to bring about democratic elections and human rights "regardless of race, religion or class."

1988

The Youth and Student's Union Association (YSUA) was legally registered on October 26, 1988 and advocated defending human rights and advancing a democratic system.

1988

The Student's Revolutionary Party for Democracy (SRPD) was legally registered on October 31, 1988 included in its democratic goals to "avoid negative attitudes in politics, such as blaming and censuring others, and to encourage positive criticism, positive speech, and positive writing and publication."

1988

The Patriotic League for Peace (PLP) was legally registered on November 1, 1988, and included educating people concerning democracy verbally and in writing.

1988

The Evergreen Young Men's Association (EGYMA) was legally registered on November 7, 1988 and its goals encompassed democratic aims of free and fair elections, support for the UN Declaration on Human Rights and prevention of dictatorship. In order to achieve those goals, the EGYMA wanted to work with all political parties instead of building a solitary power base.

1988

The People's Progressive Party (PPP) was legally registered on November 9, 1988 and aimed to establish a multi-party democratic system with the same rights and freedoms in the UN Charter

and to protect students' rights by promoting the formation of student unions.

1988

The National Politics Front (NPF) was legally registered on November 14, 1988 and aimed to be aligned with democratic rights declared in the UN Charter and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by primarily developing a state constitution.

1988

The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), a rebel organization, was founded on November 18, 1988, in Klerday at the Thai border. The DAB included The National Democratic Front; The All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF); The Committee for Restoration of Democracy in Burma, a US based Burmese exile organization; The All Burma Young Monks' Union (ABYMU); The Chin National Front (CNF) and many other groups. There are more than 300,000 Buddhist Monks in Burma, and the ABYMU formed an important part of The National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) and The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). The aim of DAB included the overthrow The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

1988

The Chin National Front (CNF) was founded as a Chin rebel organization, with a military arm known as The Chin National Army. The Chin National Army was the first armed force in the Chin State, and a part of a 23 member alliance with the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB). In 1991, the 2 parties of the Chin minority group, The Zomi (Chin) National League for Democracy (CNLD) won 2 seats in the 485 seat national parliament.

1988

The All Burma Youth League Headquarters (ABYLH) was legally registered on November 21, 1988 and advocated working for democratic freedoms.

1988

The League for Democracy and Peace (LDP) was legally registered on November 21, 1988 by U Nu, the Prime Minister elected in 1962, and declared to "safeguard the fundamental rights of mankind."

1988

The League of New Generation (LNG) was legally registered on November 28, 1988 and advocated free and fair elections and ensuring democratic rights.

1988

The All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) was an umbrella insurgent student organization, which promoted peaceful opposition to the military government, and went underground after the coup. The ABSDF, the largest organization advocating armed student struggle, was formed in November 1988 at The Karen National Union's base. The organization was chaired by U Tun Aung Gyaw.

1988

The All Burma Federation of Students Union (ABFSU) was an organization formed between August and November of 1988, by students with democratic goals. It was one of the few groups at that time with no legal registration. At its founding rally, Paw U Tun (U meaning "men of superior age or social status") called for democracy, a government supporting fair and free elections and peaceful demonstrations. Paw U Tun was arrested on March 24 1989. The organization was also

led by Min Ko Naing (Ko meaning "elder brother") and boasted membership of 50,000 students.

1988

The State Restoration Law and Order Council (SLORC) restricted democratic freedoms; enacted laws to ban liberties and arrested opposition group members defying legislation. The Chief of the Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI) published literature describing infiltration by opposition groups, such as: The Communist Party of Burma (CPB); The National Democratic League (NLD); The Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS); The League for Democracy and Peace (LDP); The People's Progressive Party (PPP); and The National Politics Front (NPF). Ethnic diversity emerged as a result of the conflict and opposition. The main ethnic insurgent groups included Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) or Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Kayin (Karen) National Union (KNU).

1989

The People's Defense Force (PDF) was founded on December 26, 1989, as a new democratic force with the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and The National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) as members. Ex-Colonel Sein Mya, who died in 1993, was the original leader of PDF. The current Chairman is Kyaw Htet, who was released from prison in Thailand on June 18, 1996. The PDF has been a major National Democratic League (NLD) ally by helping NLD members to escape from Burma. The PDF has been a force in Moulmein, Ye, Mergui, Tavoy, Thahon and the Pegu, Ragoon and Irawaddy districts.

1989

The Shan State Army (SSA) majority initiated peace with The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The balance of the SSA was aligned with The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) or Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

1989

The National League for Democracy Justice (NLDJ) was legally registered on January 6, 1989, and promoted a democratic system.

1989

The League of Democratic Alliance (LDA) was legally registered on February 27, 1989, and aimed to "bring an end in...Burma [to] fascism, all forms of dictatorship and foreign-influenced administrative system," in addition to advocating democratic rights. Parties, officers and patrons were from The People's Democratic Party (PDP), the People's Volunteers Organization, the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), the Society for International Friendship, the League of New Generation, the People's Solidarity and Action Party, and The Democratic Republic Front.

Country Name Change from Burma to Myanmar

1989

On June 18, 1989, the name of the country, Burma, was changed to Myanmar by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The word, Myanmar, sometimes spelled, Myanma, is a Bamar word meaning self-reliance. Because the military junta changed the name to Myanmar, many, including opposition groups, still only recognize the name Burma.

1989-1990

Burmese military forces captured all military bases set up by the following opposition groups: The Kayin (Karen) National Union (KNU); The New Mon State Party (NMSP); and The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) or Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

The Main Opposition to SLORC: The National Democratic League (NLD)

1990

An election was held on May 27, 1990, in which The National Democratic League (NLD) won 81% (392 out of 485) of the Assembly seats and 60% of the valid popular votes over the State Law and Order and Restoration Council (SLORC). 73% of the eligible population voted in the election. However, the military refused to honor NLD's victory and did not transfer power from the government to the NLD. Many NLD members were arrested and activists fled to the Thailand border.

1990

As a result of the elections, on December 18, 1990, NLD parliamentarians who were not arrested fled to Thailand and formed an exile government, The National Coalition Government for the Union of Burma (NCGUB). The NCGUB Prime Minister was Dr. Sein Wein. Since 1993, the NCGUB is based in Washington, D.C. and does government and lobbying work on behalf of the Burmese. In the 1990's, the Karen National Union (KNU), the Anti-Military Dictatorship National Solidarity Committee (ADNSC), the All-Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), and the National Democratic League (NLD) were headquartered at Manerplaw, an insurgent Burmese-Thai base. In April 1991, the NLD leaders in Yangon were forced by the military to drop U Tin Oo and Aung San Suu Kyi from their membership. The KNU embraced militancy and armed revolt. Revolt groups were common in areas such as Kayin (Karen), Kachin, Shan and the Mon States, where torture and execution happened.

1991

"The Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL) was deregistered on January 31, 1991 because its General Secretary Daw Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein and some members of its Central Executive Committee had allegedly establish[ed] links with the armed rebels with the intent to revolt against the state' and therefore turned the AFPFL into 'an overt organization of the rebels.'"

1991

The League for Democracy and Peace "(LDP) was deregistered on February 4, 1991. According to an Election Commission announcement the party had split after the SLORC 'dismissed' U Nu and other party patrons and members of its Central Executive Committee for refusing to dissolve the 'parallel government' they set up shortly before the military coup on September 18, 1988. The Commission ruled that because of the split, the LDP was 'nullified by itself.'"

1991

The Palaung State Liberation Party (PSLP) was through April 1991 an ally of The Karen National Union (KNU) in opposition to The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). However, in 1992-1993, most of the PSLP leadership decided to relinquish arms and the PSLP was legalized by SLORC as a political organization.

1991

On October 14 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1992-1993

In April 1992, The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) invited illegal groups to become legal political parties in order that the parties may be a part of development projects. The following groups accepted the invitation to become legal: Kokang National Group; Wa National Group; Shan State Army (SSA); Shan/Ahka National Group; New Democratic Army (Kachin) (NDA); Kachin Defense Army (KDA); Pa-O National Organization (PNO); Palaung State

Liberation Party (PSLP); Kayan National Guard (KNG); The Kachin Independence Organization or Army (KIO) (KIA); Kayini National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF); Kayan New Land Party (KNLP); Shan National People's Liberation Organization (SNPLO). SLORC continued to extend invitations for legalization.

1992-1993

The Karen National Union (KNU) did not accept The State Law and Order Restoration Council's (SLORC's) invitation for legalization. In fact, during these times of suspension of military operations, The KNU organized other illegal armed groups at the Manerplaw base into The National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) led by Bo Mya, also the leader of the KNU. The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) was known as "a parallel government" to the National League for Democracy (NLD) because it contained many elected NLD candidates.

1992-1994

The Karen National Union (KNU) bombed and attacked The Htimukhee Tatmadaw ("military government"), The Hweponlang Post, and columns in Bilin, Thaton, Pa-an, Hlaingbwe, Kawkareik, Myawaddy, Kyaikmaraw, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, Yay, Dawai, Palaw, Tanintharyi and Bokpyin townships to continue SLORC opposition.

1994

On April 10 and 12, 1994, The Karen National Union (KNU), a largely Buddhist organization, dispatched KNU officers to cooperate with the Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA). To reciprocate, the MTA sent officers to coordinate military and economic cooperation between the KNU and MTA. However, the peace efforts of The KNU backfired when Bo Mya of the KNU treated the Buddhist monk, Myaing-gyi-ngu Sayadaw U Thuzana, with disrespect by evicting him and about 40 other monks from the area. An armed revolt ensued based on KNU internal strife and beliefs of discrimination based on religious beliefs; unfairness in promotions and unwillingness to attain peace.

1994

On December 1, 1994, the 3,000 people, who split from the Karen National Union (KNU) and revolted, formed the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Organization (DKBO).

1995

On January 1, 1995, the Karen National Union (KNU) launched an attack on the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Organization (DKBO). With the support of SLORC and the populace, the DKBO won a number of victories, and finally took over the Manerplaw base and KNU headquarters.

1995

As a result of the internal strife and defeat of the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Organization (DKBO) victory, Buddhists, Christians, and Kayin people have repatriated to Myanmar. As of February 10, 1995, a total of 5,000 people returned to Myanmar.

1996

The Student's and Youth Congress of Burma (SYCB) was founded in January 1996. The SYCB is composed of 10 student and youth organizations from Thailand and India, representing various nationalities. The SYCB is comprised of: the All Arakanese Students and Youth Congress (AASYC), the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), The All Burma Student's League (ABSL), The All Kachin Student's and Youth Union (AKSYU), The Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), The Kuki Student's Democratic Front (KSDF), The Karen Youth Organization (KYO), The National League for Democracy (NLD) - Liberated Area (Youth), The Overseas Mon

National Student's Organization (OMNSO) and The Pa-O Youth Democratic Organization (PYDO).

Change from The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Military Government

1997

On November 15, 1997, the name of The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was changed to The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in order to remove most of the former General leaders. Currently, 28 of the 40 Cabinet members are military, with Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw as the only civilian in a senior position. General Than Shwe remains the Chairman of SPDC, as does Khin Nyunt remain the Intelligence Chief.

1998

The National Council of the Union of Burma was formed on September 16, 1998, under orders of 25 National Democratic League (NLD) elected parliament members and 4 ethnic parties: Shan National League for Democracy, Arakan League for Democracy, Mon National League for Democracy, and Zomi (Chin) National Congress.

1998

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) arrested and detained National Democratic League and other opposition members, who had "sparked unrest," as well as NLD parliamentarians that the SPDC later admitted holding as hostages in October and November.

1999

Dr. Michael Aris, Suu Kyi's husband of 27 years, was dying of prostate cancer in England. He applied for a visa to Burma to die in his wife's arms, however, his visa was denied. Instead, the SPDC encouraged Aung San Suu Kyi to fly to her husband's side. She stated that the SPDC took advantage of the situation to attempt to get her out of Burma, because everyone knew that once she left, she would not be able to return to Burma. She did not attend the funeral of her husband on March 28, 1999, nor did she visit her two sons.

2000

Since 1989, cease fire agreements with some opposition groups have been finalized, however, fighting still occurs along the Thailand-Burma border under the regulation of Royal Thai Government (RTG).

2000

On May 2, 2000, the Burmese government accused Aung San Suu Kyi of The National Democratic League (NLD) and her followers of links to rebel groups and "contacts with dissidents and armed terrorist groups." They could "face the death penalty or life imprisonment" for high treason.

2000

In July 2000, The National Democratic League (NLD) filed a suit, for the second time, with The Supreme Court accusing General Than Shwe, Chief of the Military Council and Chairman of The Election Commission of violating electoral law and NLD harassment. In response, Military Spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Hla Min said the NLD should behave "in a more responsible and constructive manner with the aim of doing serious work in solving Myanmar's real challenges." He added that the government was "working hard to develop Myanmar in it's transition to a stable democracy."

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Burma [Myanmar]

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR01001.ZCH
Date:	March 28, 2001
Subject:	Burma [Myanmar]: Information on the Situation of Rohingyas
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Burma / Access to justice / Armed forces / Armed resistance movements / Brutality / Child labor / Country of first asylum / Cruel treatment / Destruction of dwellings / Discrimination based on ethnic origin / Discrimination based on political opinion / Displaced persons / Economic conditions / Ethnic cleansing / Ethnic conflicts / Ethnic minorities / Expropriation / Forced migration / Forced removals / Gender-based violence / Gross human rights violations / Internal exile / Military repression / Non-refoulement / Population transfers / Poverty / Religious discrimination / Religious minorities / Religious persecution / Unpaid work / Vulnerable groups

Query:

Please provide information on the Rohingya of Burma. Are the Rohingya who have returned from Bangladesh to Burma under UNHCR auspices now citizens of Burma? Also, what information does the RIC have on the RSO? Do they engage in terrorist acts?

Response:

[In keeping with the practice of the US Department of State, the Resource Information Center will use the term "Burma" as opposed to "Myanmar," though the Burmese government renamed Burma "the Union of Myanmar" in 1989.]

The situation of Rohingya residents of Burma, particularly in Arakan State (renamed Rakhine state by the ruling State Peace and Development Council [SPDC] in 1990), is very complicated. Many sources cite difficulty in obtaining accurate, objective, and current information on the situation of Rohingyas who have returned to Burma since the early to mid-1990s mass outflow of Rohingyas into neighboring Bangladesh and Thailand.

According to the US Department of State:

The [Burmese] Government's restriction on travel by foreign journalists, NGO staff, U.N. agency staff, and diplomats; its monitoring of the movements of such foreigners; its frequent interrogation of citizens about contacts with foreigners; its restrictions on the freedom of expression and association of citizens; and its practice of arresting citizens who passed information about government human rights abuses to foreigners all impeded efforts to collect or investigate information about human rights abuses. Reports of abuses, especially those committed in prisons or ethnic minority areas, often emerged months or years after the abuses allegedly were committed and seldom could be verified with certainty (Feb. 2001).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Rohingyas are Muslim and settled in what is now western Burma (Arakan State) in three waves: from the 7th through the 13th centuries, in the 15th century, and from 1826 through the 1940s under British rule (FIDH Apr. 2000, 5). They have intermarried with the indigenous population, and are now believed to constitute just under half the population of Arakan State, which is estimated at 4.5 million (Refuge Dec. 2000, 38; UNHCR 1995). The ethnic majority in Arakan is the Rakhine people who are Buddhists (World Directory of Minorities 1997, 553).

The largest of the several pre-1992 mass displacements of the Rohingya was in 1978 when the Burmese government announced that illegal immigration from neighboring Bangladesh had increased alarmingly (Refuge Dec. 2000, 39). "In a campaign disguised as a search for illegal immigrants," (Refuge Dec. 2000, 39) the Burmese government produced a wave of 130,000 to 200,000 refugees to Bangladesh (Refuge Dec. 2000, 39; World Directory of Minorities 1997, 553). Under international pressure, the government of Burma allowed the refugees to return even though it maintained that they were nationals of Bangladesh who had illegally entered Burma (Refuge Dec. 2000, 38-39).

In the general elections of 1990, the majority of Rohingyas supported the National League for Democracy (NLD), whose focus was termination of the military regime SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council, renamed State Peace and Development Council [SPDC] in 1997). The SLORC negated the election results and stepped up its campaign against ethnic minorities that had supported the NLD. The SLORC also alleged that the Rohingya were aiding and abetting insurgents who were seeking an independent state of Arakan (Refuge Dec. 2000, 38-39).

From December 1991 to March 1992, between 210,000 and 250,000 Rohingya fled Burma for Bangladesh, claiming rape, torture, summary killings, confiscation and destruction of homes and property, destruction of mosques, physical abuse, religious persecution, and forced labor by Burmese armed forces (Refuge Dec. 2000, 38-39). After a visit to Bangladesh, US Committee for Refugees (USCR) stated that "the Myanmar [Burmese] Military's actions were part of a deliberate campaign of terror aimed at driving the Rohingyas out of Myanmar," and the UN Special Rapporteur to Myanmar announced that the Muslims in Arakan were "at high risk" (as cited in Refuge Dec. 2000, 39).

All but around 20,000 of the original 210-250,000 Rohingya refugees have returned to Burma. The voluntariness of the return of some of the refugees is questioned if not disputed by groups such as Human Rights Watch/Asia and Refugees International (Aug. 1997), US Committee for Refugees (Aug. 1996, Apr. 2000), and the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (1999).

REASONS FOR DISPLACEMENT

According to the UN Special Rapporteur to Myanmar, "the problem of displacement in Myanmar is complex and open to so many different interpretations that a comprehensive assessment is difficult" (cited in NRC/IDP 7 July 2000, 3). The Rapporteur cited counter-insurgency operations, forced labor, and land confiscation as the main causes of displacement in Burma, and stated also:

Violence against civilians appear [sic] to have been a fundamental component of the overall military strategy of the Myanmar army.

The scale of the relocations increased significantly after 1996.

Displacement is also attributed to major development projects undertaken by the Government in the process of which large number [sic] of persons are removed from the lands (NRC/IDP 7 July 2000, 3).

While the reasons for displacement vary among the ethnic regions targeted by the Burmese military, forced movement of civilians, forced labor, and attacks by the military against civilians are common factors.

The forced relocations are often accompanied by labor requirements (USDOS Feb. 2001), and the Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project reports that the level of required forced labor is unsustainable and that the burden falls especially hard on the Rohingya (7 July 2000, 7). "According to local reports...all of the men and boys of a village (between the ages of 7 and 35) contribute 10 days per month of labor to the military" (USDOS Feb. 2001). The laborers receive no compensation, and are unable to provide for their families during this time (NCGUB July 1999, 249). Women and children are also forced to work as porters for the military, and families "routinely called upon their children to help fulfill their households' forced labor obligations, without government opposition" (USDOS Feb. 2001). The Rohingyas claim that they are the only group forced labor is required of [in areas heavily populated by the Rohingya], and that the Burman settlers who live in nearby model villages are exempt from portering, forced labor, and forced contributions of food (USDOS Feb. 2001). Other reports state that the Rohingya have claimed that Burmese authorities require labor of other ethnic groups only when Rohingya workers are not readily available (USCR Aug. 1996, 7).

Human Rights Watch and Refugees International report that because forced labor is officially required of all residents of Burma by the military, the UNHCR does not view forced labor as grounds for the Rohingya to receive refugee status, since the Rohingya are not specifically targeted.

...UNHCR has taken a pragmatic approach and attempted to negotiate a reduction in the burden of forced labor on the [Rohingya] returnees. The agency has maintained since 1994 that returnees are only required to work four days of every month...and that monitoring by UNHCR representatives in Arakan has not revealed any increase. Returnees and visitors to the region, however, consistently report that the burden of forced labor remains much higher than the figure cited by UNHCR, and there is concern that UNHCR's sixteen international staff in Arakan cannot effectively monitor the situation for the 200,000 returnees in an area where transportation is extremely difficult (Aug. 1997, 11).

The Rohingya also report confiscation of land and property with no compensation or legal recourse (NCGUB July 1999, 249).

REPATRIATION OF THE ROHINGYAS TO BURMA

The repatriations of 1992 were carried out under a bilateral agreement between Burma and Bangladesh that allowed UNHCR only very restricted access to the refugees, and it is alleged that forced repatriations occurred. Some refugees interviewed by UNHCR said they did not want to return. UNHCR announced their withdrawal from the repatriations in December 1992 due to incomplete UNHCR access to refugees and reports of forced returns and abuse of refugees by camp officials (USCR Aug. 1996, 5; UNHCR 1995). In May 1993, UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Bangladesh for cooperation to ensure the "safe and voluntary repatriation" of those who opted to return (USCR Aug. 1996, 5). In November 1993, UNHCR and the Burmese government agreed that UNHCR would be permitted to assist in resettlement of the Rohingya returnees to Burma (USCR Aug. 1996, 5).

According to UNHCR, it has been difficult to reintegrate the returned Rohingyas in Burma because the majority of the Burmese population views them as aliens. This is in part due to the ancient Arab and Persian ancestry of the Rohingyas, Rohingya support for the British during colonialism, fears of illegal immigration from mostly Muslim Bangladesh, and concern about possible security threats posed by two armed Rohingya rebel groups which are said to be supported [or may have been supported] by foreign governments (1995).

For more information on the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Burma, please see BGD01001.ZCH.

LEGAL STATUS OF ROHINGYAS

Reports state that most Rohingya are not considered citizens of Burma by the Burmese government (USDOS Feb. 2001, USCR April 2000, 5; FIDH April 2000, 13; HRW/Asia & RI Aug. 1997, 9). The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) states that the 1982 citizenship law which excludes most Rohingya from citizenship status was designed specifically to deny citizenship to the Rohingya (1999, 247-248). Under the 1982 Burmese citizenship law, there are three categories of citizenship:

--Citizen: [i.e. ancestors had residency in Burma back to 1823, and this can be proven (USCR Apr. 2000, 5)]

--Associate citizen

--Naturalized citizen (NCGUB July 1999, 248)

Some form of citizenship is required for access to basic social, health, and educational services (NCGUB July 1999, 248).

It is difficult for the vast majority of Rohingya to fit into any of these categories of citizenship, not only due to family situations but to difficulty in providing proof of eligibility. Most are thus recognized as "foreign residents" (NCGUB July 1999, 248).

Since 1989, all Burmese residents have had to apply for new "Citizenship Scrutiny Cards," which are color-coded for ease of categorization of citizenship status:

--Full citizens receive pink cards

--Associate citizens receive blue cards

--Naturalized citizens receive green cards

--Foreigners Registration Cards (FRC) are white (NCGUB July 1999, 248)

These ID cards ensure that benefits will not be granted to those who are not entitled, and the cards are required for "the smallest of transaction" in Burma, e.g. buying bus, boat, train, plane tickets; applying to attend school; and leaving one's ward (NCGUB July 1999, 248).

Human Rights Watch/Asia and Refugees International have stated that "the Rohingyas [will] always remain a vulnerable group as long as the [Burmese government] refuse[s] to recognize them as citizens" (Aug. 1997, 5).

ROHINGYA RETURNEES TO BURMA

As part of the repatriation process under UNHCR auspices, lists of names of willing returnees, the names of their villages of origin, and any other identifying information is sent to Burma for verification by Burmese immigration officials before the refugees are allowed to return. The Burmese authorities verify whether or not the applicant for return is a former resident of Burma. Applicants who are verified as former residents are allowed to return and those who are not verified as former residents are rejected. The verification process is often very lengthy and complicated by marriages that occurred while in Bangladesh and by separation of family members (NCGUB July 1999, 248).

Upon their arrival in Burma, returnees are photographed in a reception center and issued a yellow identity card for a fee of 50 kyat [official exchange rate 6 kyat per US\$]. This yellow card identifies the returnees as "having returned from another country, but [gives] them no

legal status" (NCGUB July 1999, 249).

Since November 1993, UNHCR has been granted access to Arakan, and was subsequently given permission to travel freely through the state, though this is sometimes logistically difficult. The UNHCR reported that "by mid-1995, [there was] no evidence [found] to suggest that the returnees were being subjected to persecution or discrimination, although some incidents have taken place involving the detention and relocation of former refugees" (1995). UNHCR has official presence in Rangoon (Burma's capital) and Arakan, and reports that it can monitor the welfare of returned refugees and provide them with food, a cash grant, and other forms of individual assistance upon their return. UNHCR is also monitoring implementation of community-based rehabilitation projects such as water, health, and income-generating projects (1995).

CURRENT SITUATION FOR ROHINGYA IN BURMA

The Burmese government continues to deny citizenship to most Rohingya (USDOS Feb. 2001, HRW Dec. 2000, 174). In 2000, the Burmese authorities continued to forcibly relocate Rohingya residents of Arakan, replacing them with Buddhist Burman settlers who were themselves forced to move from their homes in Rangoon Division. These forced relocations are often accompanied by labor requirements in which the Rohingya are compelled to build infrastructure for the settlers and army units, and have also been forced to build Buddhist pagodas (USDOS Feb. 2001). According to the US Committee for Refugees, the SPDC openly acknowledges its policy of forced relocation, stating that it is for the overall good of the country (April 2000, 15).

The USDOS reports that the military continued to force Rohingya to serve as porters in military activity against ethnic insurgents. This practice "continued to lead to mistreatment, illness, and death..." and "porters who no longer can work often either are abandoned without medical care or assistance, or executed" (Feb. 2001).

Human Rights Watch reports:

[In 2000], the Rohingya were subject to restrictions on their freedom of movement, arbitrary taxation, and extortion by local officials. Forced labor was also common. A direct consequence of ongoing abuses was the gradual movement of Rohingya refugees into the Bangladeshi labor market (Dec. 2000, 174).

The Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project reports that the policy of the Burmese government is to move the Rohingyas to the northern part of the Maungdaw and Buthidaung districts (areas in western Arakan on the Bangladesh border). Most Rohingyas from Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U or Minbya districts have already been moved to the North.

Many villages now being burned by SPDC troops were first burned in 1975..., and some villagers speak of having been on the run from Burmese troops since 1975. But even these villagers say that in the past two to three years things have grown much worse. The...mass forced relocations, the destruction of villages and the village economies, and completely unsustainable levels of forced labor, have now become the central pillar of SPDC policy in non-Burman rural areas of Burma. Where, in the past, two or three villages were destroyed at a time, now 100 villages are destroyed at a time (7 July 2000).

According to FIDH:

Everything tends to show that the Burmese government aims at emptying Arakan of its Rohingya population, though in an insidious and incremental way so as not to attract the attention of the international community, as had been the case in 1991-92. According to reliable and corroborating sources, between 1996 and 1999, somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 Rohingyas have reportedly crossed the border to find refuge back in Bangladesh (Apr. 2000, 44).

In reference to the possibility of safe return of Rohingyas to Burma, Human Rights Watch and Refugees International state:

[T]here are circumstances in which some individuals and families may not be subject to abuses of sufficient severity to amount to persecution. Much depends on the attitude of the local military commander or other government officials such as NaSaKa officers [Burmese border guard] and IMPD [Immigration and Manpower Department] personnel. Abusive officials, however, are in no danger of being punished by their superiors and their victims have no legal recourse. In some cases, individuals or families may be protected from abuse by their social or financial position, their willingness and ability to cooperate with the authorities, perhaps at the expense of other Rohingyas, or other factors (1997, 9).

A UN Integrated Development Programme (UN-IP) was at one time expected to take over UNHCR assistance activities in Burma by January 2001, but UNHCR is now projected to remain in Northern Rakhine State (Arakan) until the end of 2001 when a UN Development Programme (UNDP) "multi-sectoral assistance programme," slated to begin 1 June 2001, will take over assistance activities (Country Operation: Myanmar 2000). Until then, UNHCR states, its goals in Burma are to support and monitor voluntary repatriation, reintegration, and stabilization of returnees; promote self-reliance activities; and support the most vulnerable returnees (Country Operation: Myanmar 2000).

UNHCR reports that Burmese authorities built two new model villages for returnees in 2000. Although this involved labor, land, and material requirements on the part of Muslim locals, the authorities reimbursed the adversely affected communities with surplus materials from the project. UNHCR also reports that in June 2000, Burmese authorities further restricted freedom of movement of Muslims in Arakan; to travel outside the area they must now obtain permission from village authorities as well as from the authorities in their township (Country Operation: Myanmar 2000).

ROHINGYA SOLIDARITY ORGANIZATION (RSO)

The Rohingya Solidarity Organization was formed in the early 1980s and switched from political to armed activity after the 1991-92 mass exodus of Rohingyas from Arakan (NRC/IDP 7 July 2000). The RSO "essentially acts by infiltration and attacks in Northern Arakan from Bangladesh" and it is believed that the RSO is or has been financed by the Bangladeshi government (NRC/IDP 7 July 2000, UNHCR 1995). RSO insurgents detonated bombs in towns and villages along the western border of Arakan, resulting in several deaths and injuries in 1994 (USDOS Feb. 1995, 543). In January 1998, armed refugees thought to be RSO members seized Nayapara camp, and on January 26, a clash between the RSO and Burmese security forces near the Bangladesh border resulted in three deaths. There were periodic reports of clashes between the RSO and Burmese security forces in the late 90s, and it is believed that the RSO are active in the refugee camps (University of Maryland 22 Aug. 1999). Some news reports allege that "militant refugees" have impeded some voluntary repatriations, influenced in part by the RSO and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) (Refugee Dec. 2000, 41).

At one time, the RSO and the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO) joined to form the Arakan Rohingya Islami (ARIF), but the RSO left the ARIF in 1998 (The Independent 23 Jan. 2001). January 2001 AFP articles state that "several rebel groups [still] are known to be fighting for the independence of Arakan state," and "border skirmishes between [Burma and Bangladesh] are not uncommon as Myanmar rebels from the separatist Rohingya Solidarity Organisation regularly seek refuge in Bangladesh" (23 Jan. 2001, 11 Jan. 2001).

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project:

Generally speaking, the armed Rohingya resistance is not very active and constitutes above all a pretext for the militarization of the region [Arakan] as well as a way for the Burmese junta to keep a close watch on the population (7 July 2000).

The RSO is not designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. Department of State (April 2000).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Burma (Myanmar)

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR01002.ZLA
Date:	July 12, 2001
Subject:	Burma: Information on Exit and Return
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Arrest / Discrimination based on citizenship / Discrimination based on ethnic origin / Discrimination based on political opinion / Freedom of movement / Political asylum / Right to a passport / Right to leave and return to one's country / Travel documents

Query:

Please provide information on exit and return to Burma.

Response:

According to a representative of the US Committee for Refugees (USCR), large numbers of Burmese exit and return to Burma via common borders with Bangladesh, Thailand, and China. Each returnee is documented and taxed. In some cases, documentation is confiscated and handed over to local surveillance authorities. These individuals generally return home without further incident (20 June 2001).

Travel to and from the U.S. (and other destinations) is common for the traveling elite and the better-off business class in Burma who obtain passports through proper channels. Those who have fewer connections or who have ambiguous reasons for travel must often resort to bribery to obtain a passport. All but a privileged few must relinquish their passports at the airport upon return to Burma, although the passport may be kept in cases where a traveler has satisfactory documentation indicating further travel within 6 months. Those who must turn in their passports upon return to Burma must reapply for the same passport for future travel. Burmese Customs officers x-ray all incoming luggage, generally searching for taxable goods and contraband, but books and tapes will also draw their attention (USCR 20 June 2001).

Those who hold passports yet abscond from Burma will probably be unable to renew their passports if they return to Burma (presuming no other outstanding matter except the previous flight from the country). The situation is generally the same for family members of such individuals (USCR 20 June 2001).

Travel to unauthorized destinations, e.g., obtaining a passport for travel to Singapore or Bangkok and then going to several other places, does not generally raise scrutiny upon one's return to Burma. On the other hand, those who seek to emigrate illegally to the U.S. likely will be jailed upon return to Burma. Also, those who return to Burma with an expired passport, and those who have "caused embarrassment" to the government, e.g., applied for asylum abroad, could be immediately jailed upon return to the country [if the Burmese government becomes aware of the embarrassment to the regime] (USCR 20 June 2001).

According to the US Department of State:

"The [Burmese] Government carefully scrutinizes prospective travel abroad. This facilitates rampant corruption, as many applicants are forced to pay large bribes (sometimes as high as \$3,000, about 1.2 million Kyat; the equivalent of 10 years' salary for the average citizen) to obtain passports. The official board that reviews passport applications has denied passports on political grounds. All college graduates who obtained a passport (except for certain government employees) are required to pay a special education clearance fee to reimburse the Government for the cost of their education. In February the Government issued new regulations on overseas employment passports that ultimately made it harder for citizens to travel overseas. Citizens who had emigrated legally generally were allowed to return to visit relatives. Some who had lived abroad illegally and had acquired foreign citizenship also were able to return. Those residents unable to meet the restrictive provisions of the citizenship law, such as ethnic Chinese, Arakanese, Muslims, and others, must obtain prior permission to travel. Since the mid-1990's, the Government also has restricted the issuance of passports to female citizens" (Feb. 2001).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Burma [Myanmar]

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR02001.RIC
Date:	June 24, 2002
Subject:	Burma [Myanmar]: Information on Ethnic Minorities, Democracy Movement
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Burma [Myanmar] / Arbitrary arrest / Arbitrary detention / Armed resistance movements / Child labour / Child prostitution / Civil and political rights / Corruption / Disadvantaged groups / Forced removals / Freedom of movement / Freedom of peaceful assembly / Freedom of political opinion / Freedom of religion / Military repression / Opposition leaders / Paramilitary forces / Political movements / State terror

Query:

What is the current status of ethnic minorities and the democracy movement in Burma?

Response:

SUMMARY

The highly-publicized release from house arrest of Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in May 2002 was only the most visible of a series of changes that have created a tiny opening in Burma's political space. Since late 2000, the military government that rules Burma has also held sporadic talks with Suu Kyi, allowed the party she heads to reopen offices, and released dozens of political prisoners.

At the same time, the army, which has held power in one form or another for four decades, has shown no real sign that it plans to stand down. Burmese jails still hold some 1,500 political prisoners, the government sharply suppresses basic freedoms, and ethnic minorities continue to face forced labor, forced removal from their homes, and other severe human rights abuses. Hundreds of thousands of ethnic minority civilians are either displaced within Burma or living as refugees in Thailand and other neighboring countries, driven from their homes by the army or having fled civil conflict and rights abuses.

BACKGROUND

Experts see few signs that the government intends to follow up on the prisoner releases with genuine political reforms. Burma remains "under complete military control," according to an emeritus professor at Rutgers University who is a leading authority on the Southeast Asian country (Emeritus professor 18 Jun 2002). The professor also said that the cash-strapped government released Suu Kyi and other political prisoners only as part of a push to get Western sanctions lifted and international aid restored. "They want American policy changed to be able to sell more goods to the American market" (Emeritus professor 18

Jun 2002).

The U.S. government bans new investment by American companies in Burma and prevents the Government of Burma from getting loans and grants from the Asian Development Bank and other multilateral lending institutions. "As long as the U.S. will not move on multilateral funds, the Burmese are deeply in trouble" (Emeritus professor 18 Jun 2002).

The Government of Burma also faces pressure from the European Union, which continues to suspend trade preferences and most aid, and from the International Labor Organization (ILO), which in 2000 called on its members to "review" their relations with Burma (Emeritus professor 18 Jun 2002).

Similarly, Western diplomats told the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW that Suu Kyi's release probably had more to do with attracting foreign investment than with any commitment to political reforms (Lintner 16 May 2002).

Some Asian security experts say that the government will be able to withstand Western pressure for true reforms despite the country's economic troubles as long as China continues to back the regime, which calls itself the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). In return for Beijing's support, the SPDC has provided China with naval and increased commercial access to the Indian Ocean and allowed Chinese businesses to flourish in northern Burma (Young 6 Jun 2002).

There is also little evidence of a split between hardliners and moderates in the military of the sort that helped foster democratic transitions in other authoritarian countries, according to the emeritus professor (18 Jun 2002). Specifically, he rejected the view of some Burma analysts that Khin Nyunt, the military intelligence chief, is a relative moderate who might favor some political reforms. He said that Khin Nyunt and army commander Maung Aye, who are vying to formally succeed the ailing Than Shwe as SPDC leader, "need each other" to stay in power (Emeritus professor 18 Jun 2002).

Some observers looked for signs of rifts within the SPDC in the March 2002 arrest of four close relatives of former military strongman Ne Win for allegedly plotting to topple the government (ECONOMIST 16 Mar 2002). Diplomats and other sources in Rangoon, however, told the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW that the government arrested Ne Win's son-in-law and three of the 90-year-old ex-dictator's grandsons simply to undercut their growing business clout (FEER 4 Apr 2002).

Suu Kyi's release on 6 May 2002 after 19 months of house arrest followed months of talks between her and the SPDC that began in late 2000, prodded by UN special envoy Razali Ismail (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002). Following her release, Suu Kyi called for an immediate dialogue with the government on Burma's political future, with an initial focus on getting more political prisoners freed (FEER 23 May 2002).

Even as Suu Kyi and several other politicians traveled upcountry or made speeches for the first time in several years, conditions remained bleak in ethnic minority areas. The recent widening of Burma's political space has done little to improve the plight of ethnic minorities, the U.S. State Department's desk officer for Burma said in a telephone interview, with abuses continuing unabated (U.S. DOS 24 Jun 2002).

Recent reports by the U.S. State Department, the UN, and Amnesty International suggest that the tatmadaw, or Burmese armed forces, continued to force ethnic minority villagers to work on roads and other infrastructure projects and carry heavy loads for troops. Soldiers also continued to extort money and seize food and livestock from villagers in ethnic minority areas. Soldiers prevented forcibly relocated civilians in areas facing ethnic-based insurgencies from returning to their homes, and, in some cases, they killed, tortured, or raped civilians (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002; UN 10 Jan 2002; AI 1 May 2002).

As this report went to publication in June 2002, more than 700 Karen refugees had recently fled to Thailand from Kyar Inn Seik Kyee township near the Thai border after the army reportedly burnt their villages as part of its counterinsurgency operations (AP 2 Jun 2002).

The Karen villagers joined more than 120,000 Karen and Karenni refugees from Burma already living in refugee camps in Thailand. The Government of Thailand also hosts roughly 100,000 Shan refugees, but prevents them from entering the camps or gaining formal refugee status (AI 7 Dec 2001). At least 600,000 other ethnic minority villagers cannot return to their homes after having been forcibly relocated by the army as part of its counterinsurgency strategy (UN 10 Jan 2002).

Ethnic minorities make up about a third of Burma's population of roughly 50 million (AI 17 Jul 2001). Ethnic minorities live throughout Burma, but are concentrated mainly in the seven states and divisions named after the Shan, Kayah, Karen, Mon, Chin, Kachin, and Rakhine ethnic groups (AI 13 Jun 2001). National identity cards, which all Burmese must carry, and passports generally indicate the ethnicity of non-Burmans, either explicitly or through the use of personal titles in ethnic minority languages rather than in Burmese (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

The Rutgers University emeritus professor consulted by the RIC said that there is also little evidence that the Government of Burma has made progress in an area of acute concern to the United States government—narcotics control (18 Jun 2002). The U.S. State Department's latest international narcotics control report says that Burma in 2001 was the world's largest opium producer and the main source of amphetamine-type stimulants in Asia (U.S. DOS 1 Mar 2002).

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLING AND TORTURE OF MEMBERS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Recent reports suggest that Burma's ethnic minorities continue to face widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killing and torture. Some of the worst abuses take place in parts of Burma where the army is fighting ethnic-based rebel groups.

"There continued to be many credible reports of extrajudicial killings by soldiers of noncombatant civilians, particularly in areas of ethnic insurgencies," according to the U.S. State Department's March 2002 report on Burma's human rights record in 2001. The report said there were "numerous" incidents in 2001 of soldiers raping or killing women in the Shan, Kayah, and Karen states, killing forcibly displaced Shan villagers who were unable to help the army locate Shan guerrillas, and abandoning or killing conscripted porters in Shan State and Tenasserim Division who became too weak to work (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Similarly, Amnesty International stated in its annual report covering 2001: "Extrajudicial executions of ethnic minority civilians taking no active part in the hostilities continued to be reported, particularly in the context of the army's counterinsurgency activities, when civilians were punished for alleged contacts with armed opposition groups" (AI Jun 2002).

During counterinsurgency operations, soldiers at times tortured or killed Shan, Karen, Mon, and Karenni civilians who did not give them information about the movements of ethnic-based rebel groups, Amnesty said in an earlier report (AI 13 Jun 2001).

The U.S. State Department and Amnesty International say they also have evidence of killings, rapes, torture, and other abuses by the Karen National Union (KNU), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and other active ethnic-based rebel movements (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002; AI 13 Jun 2001).

Since independence in 1948, ethnic-based rebel armies have fought the Burman-dominated government in an effort to win greater autonomy or, in some cases,

independence. The KNU and KNPP are two of the largest ethnic-based armies still fighting (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

The KNU is active in parts of southern Burma with large Karen populations, including the Karen and Mon states and the Tenasserim and Pegu divisions, the State Department report said. The KNPP resumed fighting the government in the Kayah and Karen states following the breakdown of a 1995 cease-fire. The Shan State Army is fighting the government in the central and southern parts of Shan State in eastern Burma (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Other active rebel movements include the Chin National Front, the Naga National Council, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization, the Arakan National Organization, and the Karen National Liberation Army (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Since 1989, the government has reached cease-fire agreements with 17 ethnic-based rebel armies. The deals allow the groups to keep their weapons and carry out some governmental functions in specified areas populated mainly by members of their own ethnic groups (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

FORCED LABOR

In a June 2001 report, Amnesty International called forced labor "perhaps the most common" type of abuse faced by Burma's ethnic minorities (AI 13 Jun 2001). In a May 2002 update, the rights group said that it had "recent evidence that the military is still seizing ethnic minority civilians for unpaid forced labor in counter-insurgency areas of the Shan, Mon, and Karen States, and the Tenasserim Division" (AI 1 May 2002).

Amnesty reported that the majority of the 100 mainly ethnic minority refugees and migrant workers whom it interviewed in Thailand in February and March 2002 said they had been forced to work for the Burmese military. While some of the Shan, Akha, Lahu, Mon, Tavoyan, Karen, and Burman villagers said that the armed forces seemed to be relying less on forced labor than in the past, most reported that they had been forced to work for the military within the past year (AI 1 May 2002).

Similarly, the International Labor Organization (ILO) said in March 2002 that forced labor continued unabated in Burma despite an October 2000 national law banning the practice (ILO 18 Mar 2002). As part of its effort to prod the regime to end forced labor, in May 2002, the ILO named an interim liaison officer to Burma following months of negotiations with the SPDC over the office's mandate and scope. The interim officer, Leon de Riedmatten of the Swiss-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, is tasked with laying the groundwork for a permanent liaison mission (ILO 6 May 2002).

The government apparently has stopped using forced labor on infrastructure projects with purely civilian uses, according to a January 2002 report by the top UN rights investigator for Burma, Sergio Pinheiro. Like the Amnesty International and ILO reports, however, Dr. Pinheiro's report said that other types of forced labor continued (UN 10 Jan 2002).

The apparent decline in the use of forced labor for civil engineering projects suggests that the army is using civilians mainly for military logistical support and on infrastructure projects with dual military and civilian uses. This includes building roads and railways and building, repairing, and maintaining army barracks, the U.S. State Department and Amnesty International reported. In perhaps the most brutal type of forced labor, soldiers also make civilians porter heavy loads over rough terrain for days or weeks at a stretch (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002; AI 13 Jun 2001).

Soldiers also make civilians farm fields, cut or gather wood, and cook, clean, launder, weave baskets, and get water for army units, according to the State Department report (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002). The military forces men, women, and children to provide labor

and almost never pays civilians for their work, Amnesty International reported (AI 1 May 2002).

While soldiers seem to coerce labor from most ethnic groups, they use ethnic minorities far more often than members of the Burman majority, Amnesty says (AI 13 Jun 2001).

FORCED RELOCATION

The Burmese army has perhaps curbed, although by no means abandoned, its longstanding strategy of forcibly relocating ethnic minority villagers living in insurgency areas to prevent them from aiding guerrillas, according to observers.

Dr. Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur, told the UN Human Rights Commission in March 2002 that he had recent evidence that forced relocations have not ceased. He said that the army reportedly had forcibly moved many Wa villagers from the northeast part of Shan State to designated areas in the south. The same operations also uprooted several hundred ethnic Lahu and Chinese families (UN 28 Mar 2002).

Similarly, the U.S. State Department human rights report said that in 2001 "thousands" of ethnic minority villagers either fled or were driven from their homes to hastily built forest shelters, frequently in heavily mined areas without adequate food or basic medical care (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002). In recent years, soldiers have beaten, raped, and killed Chin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan villagers who resisted being moved. The report added that soldiers often loot and seize property and goods from villagers forced from their homes (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

A June 2001 Amnesty International report stated that the army still pushes many villagers off their lands, although not on the scale witnessed in the 1990s. The government, however, has done little to ease the hardships faced by the hundreds of thousands of villagers displaced since the mid-1990s. They generally cannot return home to harvest crops or collect belongings, have few means of earning livings, and have never been compensated for the loss of their land and possessions, the Amnesty report said (AI 13 Jun 2001).

Forced relocation is most common in the Shan, Kayah, and Karen states and in parts of Mon State and Pegu Division, the State Department report said. After forcing villagers from their homes, soldiers often make them work on infrastructure projects, the report added (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Overall, the military has since 1996 forcibly relocated at least 300,000 Shans from 1,400 villages, 20,000 to 30,000 Karenni villagers, and an unknown number of Karens and other ethnic minorities, according to Amnesty International. Amnesty also reported that soldiers have killed hundreds of Shan villagers for trying to return to their homes (AI 13 Jun 2001).

ARMY EXTORTION AND THEFT

Adding to the hardships faced by Burma's ethnic minorities, the government's 1997 policy of making army units live off the land has given soldiers free reign to extort money from villagers and force them to provide food and building materials, according to the U.S. State Department and Amnesty International (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002; AI Jun 2002).

Burmese soldiers often extort money or seize food by levying arbitrary fees or taxes. Refugees from Mon State told Amnesty International in February 2001 that soldiers made them pay an unofficial "paddy tax" of a certain amount of their rice harvest (AI 13 Jun 2001).

The refugees also told Amnesty's investigators that a local militia called the Pyi Thu Set, or

People's Army, forced them to pay taxes, and, in some cases, provide labor. The militia is made up of civilians recruited and armed by local SPDC officials (AI 13 Jun 2001).

The Burmese military has a large presence even in ethnic minority areas where no rebel groups are active, such as the large Karen areas of Irrawaddy Division in southern Burma, according to the State Department human rights report. Villagers in these areas face more military checkpoints, closer monitoring by military intelligence, and more demands for informal taxes than do residents in majority Burman areas also free of insurgency, the report said (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Another serious problem disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities is that many Burmese children continue to work as prostitutes or are trafficked for the purposes of prostitution. The number of children involved is not known, although the victims frequently are Shan girls who are sent or lured to Thailand (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

ABUSES AGAINST ROHINGYAS

Located mainly in Arakan State, Burma's Muslim Rohingya minority is subjected to "severe legal, economic, and social discrimination," in addition to the forced labor and other abuses commonly faced by the country's other ethnic minority groups, according to the U.S. State Department human rights report (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Rohingyas lack citizenship, making them ineligible for public education beyond the primary level and for most civil service jobs. The government denies citizenship to Rohingyas on the ground that their ancestors did not live in Burma at the onset of British colonial rule in 1824, as required by Burma's restrictive citizenship law (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002). It says the Rohingyas are Bengali migrants from neighboring Bangladesh who came to Arakan State to find work (AI 13 Jun 2001).

Moreover, Rohingyas must get permission from township officials to leave their village areas. Authorities generally do not allow Rohingyas to travel to Rangoon, although some Rohingyas obtain permission by bribing officials (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Rohingyas also face particularly harsh demands for forced labor. The Shan Human Rights Foundation and numerous Rohingya men say male Rohingyas must provide the army with up to 10 days of labor each month, the U.S. State Department report said. They are forced to carry food and ammunition under brutal conditions or, occasionally, to build Buddhist pagodas (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Certain townships in Arakan State, including Thangwe, Gwa, and Taung-gut, are "Muslim-free zones" in which Muslims may not live, according to the U.S. State Department's October 2001 report on international religious freedom. In these areas, security forces have destroyed mosques and confiscated land from Muslims (U.S. DOS 26 Oct 2001).

In 1991 and again in 1997 and 1998, tens of thousands of Rohingyas from Arakan State fled to Bangladesh to escape abuses. Most have since returned, although 22,000 Rohingyas reportedly remain in refugee camps in Bangladesh. More than 100,000 other Rohingyas live outside the camps with no formal refugee papers (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Muslims have been targeted in recent riots in both Arakan State and other areas. Offering evidence of what it called a "sharp increase in anti-Muslim violence" in Burma, the State Department religious freedom report said that government security and firefighting forces reportedly did little to contain attacks on Muslim mosques, businesses, and homes during February 2001 riots in Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State, that killed and wounded both Muslims and Buddhists (U.S. DOS 26 Oct 2001).

Outside Arakan State, rioting in the town of Taungoo in Pegu Division in southern Burma in 2001 targeted Muslim interests and killed some 10 Muslims and 2 Buddhists (U.S. DOS 26

Oct 2001).

The government responded to the violence by further restricting freedom of movement for Rohingyas and other Muslims, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW Dec 2001).

FORCED CONVERSION OF ETHNIC CHINS AND NAGAS

For more than a decade, soldiers have tried to coerce ethnic Chins, who are mainly Christian, to convert to the country's majority Buddhist faith and otherwise "Burmanize" the population of Chin Division, located on the western border with India. Tactics include forcing Chins to "donate" money or labor to build Buddhist monasteries and shrines, ordering Christian Chins to attend sermons by Buddhist monks who disparage Christianity, and pressuring or forcing Christian Chins to attend schools for monks and Buddhist monasteries. Soldiers have also beaten Christian clergy who refused to sign statements promising to stop preaching to non-Christians. They have also torn down or forced villagers to tear down crosses erected outside Christian Chin villages (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

The SPDC has flooded Chin Division and other Chin areas with large numbers of troops. Army units reportedly have destroyed Christian churches and graveyards to clear ground for military camps and taken over churches in remote areas for use as bases. There is also some evidence that security forces have used similar tactics to try to convert Christian Nagas to Buddhism in northwestern Burma (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Religious affiliation is sometimes noted on the identity cards that Burmese citizens and permanent residents must carry at all times. It is not clear why religious affiliation is on some cards but not others, and there is no obvious pattern in the use of this notation (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

TREATMENT OF ELECTED OFFICIALS, PARTY ACTIVISTS, AND STUDENTS

In 1990, the government permitted parliamentary elections, in which the National League for Democracy (NLD), the opposition political party headed by pro-democracy leader and Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, won over 60 percent of the popular vote and 80 percent of parliamentary seats. The army later annulled the election results. Since then, the government "systematically has violated human rights in the country to suppress the pro-democracy movement, including the NLD, and to thwart repeated efforts by the representatives elected in 1990 to convene" (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Between December 2000 and early May 2002, the SPDC freed at least 280 elected officials, party activists, and other political prisoners. According to Amnesty International, this move constituted the most releases in years. Meanwhile, there have been few new arrests of NLD politicians or party activists, unlike in past years when authorities released some political figures even as they arrested many others (AI 6 May 2002). The government has also ended its crackdown on independent lawyers who tried to provide services to the NLD (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

While the government appears to have stopped arresting NLD members and other high-profile political figures, at least for now, it has continued to arrest some grassroots activists. As this report went to publication in June 2002, a military tribunal reportedly had just handed down life sentences to four cadets at the Defense Services Technical College in Maymo who wrote a letter calling for their class to get the same treatment as cadets at another academy, according to an Oslo-based radio service set up by exiled politicians. Eighteen other cadets who distributed the letter were sentenced to between one and seven years in jail (NCGUB 22 Jun 2002).

The student jailings followed the March sentencing of Salai Tun Than, a retired university professor, to seven years in prison for violating security laws. The 74-year-old Dr. Salai, an

ethnic Chin, was arrested in November 2001 after peacefully demonstrating outside Rangoon City Hall in November 2001 to urge the regime to hold elections (AI 6 May 2002; HRW 27 Mar 2002).

These cases notwithstanding, the number of arrests in recent months of students and other grassroots activists unconnected with the NLD appears to be relatively small. This may be because few ordinary Burmese are willing to risk long jail terms to hold protests, hand out pamphlets, or otherwise campaign for democracy, according to the U.S. State Department's desk officer for Burma (U.S. DOS 24 Jun 2002).

The SPDC, meanwhile, has given no hint of when it might free the estimated 1,500 remaining political prisoners. Perhaps mindful that students were in the forefront of massive pro-democracy demonstrations that swept Burma in 1988, the government has released few student activists. Dr. Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur, said in his January 2002 report that the government had freed only one student leader, a member of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions whose jail term had expired in 1999 (UN 10 Jan 2002).

According to Dr. Pinheiro's report, the 1,500 remaining political detainees include some 800 NLD members, roughly 300 members of other political parties, students and other Burmese with no known political affiliations, and individuals held for allegedly supporting armed rebel groups. Among the detained party members are 15 NLD members-elect of parliament arrested in the 1990s and 2 MPs from the Mon National Democratic Front (UN 10 Jan 2002).

Also still in prison are 20 of the more than 40 independent lawyers jailed for political offenses in 2000, according to the U.S. State Department human rights report (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Burmese political prisoners face life-threatening conditions. There are "credible reports that the health of several political prisoners deteriorated during the year, and that at least six died in prison," the State Department report said (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

Among the political prisoners freed in 2001 were 67 members-elect of parliament. They included all members of the NLD Central Executive Committee, with the exception of Suu Kyi, who was freed in May 2002 (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

As always, observers see the government's treatment of Suu Kyi as a political bellwether. In keeping with its pledge to allow her to travel freely around the country, in June 2002, the SPDC permitted Suu Kyi to make an overnight trip outside Rangoon for the first time in several years (AP 15 Jun 2002).

Fueling skepticism about the SPDC's willingness to abide by its commitments to Suu Kyi is the way in which past deals unraveled. In 1995, the government released Suu Kyi after six years of house arrest in a move supposedly intended to lay the groundwork for talks. The SPDC again placed her under house arrest in 2000 following a series of inconclusive talks and disputes over Suu Kyi's attempts to travel outside of Rangoon (ECONOMIST 11 May 2002).

STATUS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The NLD and several other Burmese political parties recently have reopened some offices and held meetings and public gatherings without harassment for the first time in several years, but their activities remain tightly restricted.

After years of having offices shuttered and planned gatherings broken up, the NLD has reopened offices and held meetings and outdoor gatherings in Rangoon and Mandalay. In a break with the past, party leaders such as Vice-chairman U Tin Oo have even given a

handful of speeches criticizing the government (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

In one of the largest NLD public gatherings in recent years, more than 1,000 party members and supporters gathered to hear Suu Kyi speak outside the party's Rangoon headquarters on the May anniversary of the NLD's 1990 election victory (AFP 27 May 2002).

Although the government is restricting the size of NLD meetings, the very fact that the party is meeting openly stands in sharp contrast to previous years, when authorities frequently detained hundreds of party members trying to attend planned NLD meetings and public gatherings (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

In spring 2002, the NLD's efforts to carry out routine party activities received a further boost when it was allowed to reopen two offices in Irrawaddy Division and one in Magwe Division. These were the first NLD offices to be reopened outside the Rangoon and Mandalay areas (NCGUB 4 May 2002).

A Washington, DC representative of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, a government-in-exile set up by representatives elected in 1990, said in a telephone interview that he was not sure when the NLD would be allowed to reopen more offices outside of Burma's two main cities (Representative 18 Jun 2002).

In addition to the NLD, at least four other parties have reopened offices in Rangoon, Lashio, and Kentung. They are: the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD); Kokang Democracy and Unity Party (KDUP); the Lahu National Development Party (LNDP); and the National Unity Party (NUP), which is "widely regarded as close" to the SPDC, according to the UN's Dr. Pinheiro (UN 10 Jan 2002).

Despite the recent changes, the NLD and any other democratic opposition groups hoping to carry out day-to-day party activities still face severe constraints. Dr. Pinheiro told the UN Human Rights Commission in late March 2002 that officials had stopped pressuring landlords to avoid renting office space to the NLD. He suggested, however, that officials had not eased the many restrictions on party activities that he had outlined in his January 2002 report (UN 28 Mar 2002).

Parties can hold monthly meetings in their offices, the January report said, but must get official permission for public gatherings. They also must get approval to reopen offices and, with the exception of the regime-affiliated NUP, cannot publish party materials or use photocopiers or fax machines. Telephone lines to party offices, Dr. Pinheiro's report added, are disconnected. The report also said that officials reportedly were still pressuring party members to quit their parties (UN 10 Jan 2002). In recent years, the SPDC has pressured "many thousands" of NLD members and local officials to resign, according to the State Department human rights report (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

The regime, moreover, continues to closely monitor top NLD officials. Lower-level party officials are watched as well, although somewhat less closely (UN 10 Jan 2002).

In addition to the five parties that have reopened offices, five other parties are legally registered. They are: the Union Kayin League; Union Pao National Organization; Mro (aka Khami) National Solidarity Organization; Shan State Kokang Democratic Party; and the Wa National Development Party (UN 10 Jan 2002).

Some 200 other parties that also contested the 1990 elections were de-registered shortly thereafter (UN 10 Jan 2002).

The government, meanwhile, continues to use "coercion and intimidation" to get many Burmese, including nearly all state workers, to join its own mass mobilization organization, the United Solidarity and Development Association, the U.S. State Department reported

(U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002). Government employees are also generally barred from joining political parties, although this is applied selectively (U.S. DOS 2 Mar 2002).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Burma [Myanmar]

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR04001.ZMI
Date:	February 26, 2004
Subject:	Burma (Myanmar): Information on the Chin National Front / Chin National Army
From:	CIS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Burma [Myanmar] / Armed resistance movements / Disadvantaged groups / Ethnic conflicts / Ethnic minorities / Political violence / Terrorism

Query:

Has the Chin National Front (CNF)/Chin National Army (CNA) been involved in what could be considered terrorist or persecutory activities since its inception?

Does the Chin National Front or Chin National Army support or receive support from known terrorist groups within Burma, India, Bangladesh, or elsewhere or conduct extraterritorial terrorist activity in those countries?

Response:

BACKGROUND

According to the group's website, the Chin National Front (CNF) was created in March 1988 (CNF). A journalist and expert on ethnic minority groups in Burma wrote in an email to the Resource Information Center (RIC) that in 1987, Chin nationalists took the decision to join an armed coalition against Burma's central government and fight for more autonomy for the various ethnic minority groups represented by the coalition. In 1988, many young Chin fled to the Burma-India border due to pro-democracy unrest in Burma, and some joined the CNF (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). A Thailand-based expert on Burma who writes for JANE'S INTELLIGENCE REVIEW and the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW, among others, wrote in an email to the RIC that at first the CNF had no army, but in November 1988 the CNF created the Chin National Army (CNA) (Expert 24 Feb 2004). A 2002 Human Rights Watch report describes the CNA as being about "500 strong" (HRW 2002).

Since 1989, the CNF has been a member of Burma's National Democratic Front (NDF), which is made up exclusively of non-Burman ethnic armed opposition groups (CALD, CNFa). The CNF also represents the Chin people in the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), a UN-styled organization based in Hawaii that includes nations and peoples not represented in the UN (CNFa, UNPO). On its website, the CNF states that the group has testified before the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) (CNFb).

While other ethnic-based armed movements have signed peace deals with the Burmese government, the CNF/CNA have not, and sporadic fighting in Chin state continues (U.S.

DOS/INR 13 Feb 2004, Journalist 25 Feb 2004). The journalist contacted by the RIC states that there is a great deal of resultant displacement among the local Chin population, many of whom have fled to India, Malaysia, Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere. The journalist also says that the trend toward ceasefires between ethnic opposition forces and the Burmese government appears to be increasing, although "relations between the government and armed groups is...subject to flux" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). He points out that "...the CNF is one of only four main forces not to have ceasefires [with the government], but two of these— the Karen National Union and Karenni National Progressive Party— are having talks with the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council, or Government of Burma] at present, and it is thought likely that both will agree [to] terms during the year. In 2004, the SPDC appears very keen to try and achieve as much peace as possible, prior to pushing ahead with a recently-announced roadmap for political reform" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT (CNF) / CHIN NATIONAL ARMY (CNA) IN WHAT COULD BE CONSIDERED TERRORIST OR PERSECUTORY ACTIVITIES

A U.S. Department of State representative told the RIC in a telephone interview that there have been "unsubstantiated allegations of drug and arms trafficking by the CNA" but that the State Department does not have information suggesting that the CNF or CNA have been involved in terrorist activities or in abuses against civilians on any large or systematic scale (U.S. DOS/INR 13 Feb 2004).

The journalist contacted by the RIC stated in his email that "[g]enerally, [the CNA] does not control large amounts of territory, and its main targets have been military since its inception. CNF leaders claim that such tactics have been employed to prevent conflict in civilian areas as well as the targeting of the civilian population in revenge tactics" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

A U.S.-based Burma expert told the RIC in an email that the CNF is generally viewed as a "benign and unifying force" among the Chin, but cautions that the Chin are a "very heterogeneous" group and that there are some who believe that the CNF has brought trouble to the Chin by attracting more Burmese government forces to the Chin state (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004). The expert states that "[o]ne rarely hears of specific abuses by CNF/CNA personnel, but such abuses usually seem to involve extortion— excessive tax collection from villagers, and interference with cross-border trade. The taxation may be part of CNF/CNA policy, but the abuse of civilians is certainly not, and is a divergence from discipline by individual soldiers" (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004). The expert further indicates that "[t]he CNA currently operates largely as an intelligence-gathering underground resistance, with limited ambush-type attacks against Burma Army forces" (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004). The expert reports finding "widespread" support for the CNF/CNA, "particularly among young, educated Chins, who often furnish non-military support and information to the CNF/CNA or distribute CNF printed materials, and are at severe risk for that reason" (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004).

The journalist contacted by the RIC states that "[i]t is difficult to estimate how much popular support the CNF enjoys" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). Like the U.S.-based expert, the journalist points out that the local Chin population chafes at the military response the CNA's armed struggle has invited from the Burmese government and feels that "the cycle of violence...has proven difficult to stop" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

In 1999, the Burmese government accused the CNF of killing a Buddhist monk on the Burma-India border— a charge the CNF denied (BurmaNet News 14 Oct 1999). Responding to allegations that civilians had been killed by CNA landmines or been shot by CNA fighters, a CNA colonel stated in an interview with CHINLAND GUARDIAN that any such incidents would have been accidents and that the CNA does not target civilians. The colonel did admit that the CNA had closed border trade between India and Burma. He also said that CNA policy is to discipline any soldiers who may commit "mistakes" or

"misbehave" (CHINLAND GUARDIAN 20 Jan 2003).

SUPPORT BY THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT (CNF) / CHIN NATIONAL ARMY (CNA)
FOR KNOWN TERRORIST GROUPS IN BURMA, INDIA, BANGLADESH, OR
ELSEWHERE, OR SUPPORT FOR THE CNF / CNA BY TERRORIST GROUPS

The journalist contacted by the RIC states in his email that "in general, the CNF struggle is home-grown" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). The Thailand-based expert's email to the RIC says that he is unaware of contacts between the CNF/CNA and militant groups in India or Bangladesh (Expert 24 Feb 2004). Both reference ties between the CNF/CNA and the Mizos of India, who are closely ethnically related to the Chin, and are located just across the border from Chin state (Journalist 25 Feb 2004, Expert 24 Feb 2004).

CONDUCT OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY BY THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT (CNF) / CHIN
NATIONAL ARMY (CNA) OUTSIDE OF BURMA

The journalist contacted by the RIC states in his email that "the CNF has always been careful to focus on Burma, and its pre-eminent relations have been with such fronts as the ethnic National Democratic Front (NDF) and the National Council Union of Burma, which includes such pro-democracy groups as the National Coalition Government Union of Burma that maintains an office in Washington D.C." (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). He also notes that while the current trend is toward cease-fire agreements between opposition groups and the Burmese government, "armed ethnic politics" have been a regular feature in Burma's political context over the past few decades and the authority of these groups has been recognized not only by the Burmese government but by the UN and other members of the international community (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Response to Information Request

Number: MMR04002.ZNY

Date: 9 March 2004

Subject: Burma (Myanmar): Treatment of Deported Dissidents

Source: Resource Information Center, Washington, DC

Query: Provide information on the treatment of Burmese who participated in one or more protests outside of a Burmese diplomatic mission before being deported to Burma.

Response:

The Resource Information Center was unable to find information on specific cases of Burmese who participated in anti-Rangoon protests in the United States before being deported to Burma.

While none of the sources contacted by the RIC had information on U.S. deportees, several noted that recently at least one Burmese asylum-seeker has been jailed after being deported from Germany. That asylum-seeker reportedly was arrested and sentenced to a ten-year jail term upon arriving in Burma in 2002, according to *The Irrawaddy*, a newspaper run by Burmese exiles in Thailand (Naw Seng). It is not clear whether the asylum-seeker had been politically active in Germany.

Two observers told the RIC that at least some Burmese who had been involved in anti-Rangoon activities in Thailand had been persecuted after returning or being sent back to Burma. A Canadian-based activist who spent several years in Thailand working on women's rights issues in Burma said that, "The only people I know who have been persecuted for their activities outside the country were actively involved in the underground or in anti-government groups." The activist said in an e-mail message that several Burmese students who came to Thailand secretly to make contact and undergo training with dissident groups based near the border have been given long prison sentences after returning to Burma (Activist).

Similarly, a Burma researcher for the human rights group Amnesty International said that the London-based group had learned of one or more cases of Burmese who took part in anti-Rangoon activities in Thailand being arrested as soon as they were handed over to Burmese authorities (AI).

The actual level of antigovernment activity that would make a deported dissident vulnerable to persecution is unclear. A 2000 report by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade stated that, "Burmese involved in demonstrations in Australia, whilst often known to the authorities in Burma, are generally of little concern" unless they have been "repetitive demonstrators; active and high profile members of [Burmese opposition

groups] and those ringleaders of the more violent attack on the embassy in Canberra during September 1999.” The report was cited by Australia's Refugee Review Tribunal in a 2003 case in which the tribunal granted refugee status to a Burmese asylum-seeker based on his political opinions, those of his relatives, and the fact that he was from the minority Rohingya Muslim group (RRT).

The U.S. State Department's human rights report for 2003 did not mention the issue of returned asylum-seekers. It noted, however, that the Burmese Government "refused to accept Burmese deportees from other countries, but accepted the return of several thousand illegal migrants from Thailand" (DOS).

The Burmese Government apparently makes some effort to monitor or at least intimidate exiles who take part in protests outside of Burmese diplomatic missions, though it is unclear whether authorities have the capacity to learn the identities of protesters. A representative of the Washington-based U.S. Campaign for Burma, which has organized protests outside the Embassy of Burma in Washington that have included Burmese dissidents, told the RIC that embassy officials typically take photographs of protesters and videotape demonstrations (USCB).

Similarly, a representative of the Washington-based U.S. Committee for Refugees who spent several years working with Burmese refugees in Thailand said that Burmese authorities often photographed and videotaped protests by Burmese dissidents in Bangkok. The representative noted that Burmese intelligence services are known to infiltrate exile-based dissident groups to gain information on the members' activities (USCR).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Activist e-mail

Mon, 08 Mar 2004 04:56:13 +0000

From: (Deleted)

To: [redacted]

Cc: [redacted] (b)(6)(b)(7)(c)

Subject: refugee query

Dear [redacted]

The only people I know who have been persecuted for their activities outside the country were actively involved in the underground or in anti-government groups. In most cases, they were caught on covert missions inside Burma rather than arrested and returned. Several students who came to Thailand to make contact with border-based groups and undergo training were given long prison sentences. One close friend, a former [redacted] member, was sentenced to death and remains in prison. Two other friends, one a member of the [redacted] the other a member of the [redacted], were captured and disappeared. If further details would be useful, please let me know.

(b)(6)(b)(7)(c)

I assume the case you're dealing with involves someone who fears persecution if they were returned from the US. I'm sure this fear is well-grounded, but I don't know of any specific cases like this.

Best of luck with your research.

(Deleted)

Germans Repatriate Burmese Man

By Naw Seng

May 15, 2003—German authorities deported a Burmese asylum seeker last week, causing some Burmese refugees in Germany to worry that they could be next.

According to a statement issued today by Burma Bureau Germany, Mr Tun Kyaw, whose asylum application had been rejected, was arrested on May 6 and “brought immediately to Frankfurt International Airport and forcefully [sic] repatriated to Rangoon, Burma”.

“His fate is at present not known,” said the statement.

Members of the Burmese community in Germany now wonder who else faces deportation. Fifty-three Burmese with outstanding asylum applications are at risk, according to Sonny, a Burmese refugee in Germany. “It will be more difficult for us to stay if the Burmese authorities welcome repatriation,” said Sonny.

Twice last year German authorities repatriated a Burmese asylum seeker. One was reportedly arrested and sentenced to a 10-year prison term upon after arriving in Burma.

Burma Bureau Germany feels the same fate awaits anyone sent back to Burma.

Since 2000, economic opportunities have attracted more Burmese to Germany than in previous years. Most make arrangements through Burmese brokers and travel to Germany via France, said Ba Saw, a former All Burma Students’ Democratic Front member living in Germany.

There are currently over 500 Burmese refugees residing in Germany. Many have refugee status and carry Burmese passports. But recent events are causing concern among those whose asylum cases are yet to be decided.

“I think that it is possible for the German government to change their policy [on refugees] at the present time because there are a lot of unemployment problems,” said Sonny. The Burmese community could be targeted because it is smaller than other immigrant communities in Germany, he added.

Burmese in Germany are drafting a letter to send to Germany’s Justice Department asking that no one be deported to Burma. They are also conducting a signature campaign.

Response to Information Request**Number: MMR05001.NSC****Date:** 30 October 2005**Subject:** Burma: Information on Activities of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)**From:** Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.

Query: Please provide information on possible terrorist activities by members of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF).**Response:****BACKGROUND**

Following the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations in Burma, student activists and others fled to the border areas controlled by ethnic minority groups, particularly the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) (HRW Oct 2002) and "sought refuge while resolving among themselves how best to resist the military dictatorship" (ABSDF undated).

The All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), formed on November 1, 1988, is described as the "most significant" (HRW Oct 2002) and "foremost" (IRRAWADDY Jun 2002) political organization formed during that time. "Most [ABSDF members] were ethnic Burmans, many were young men, and while many were students, there were also graduates, doctors, workers, teachers, and other professionals among their ranks... Many found that joining the ABSDF was the only way to get humanitarian support, and those who did not were unable to support themselves. Hundreds became ill with malaria and other diseases unknown in the cities they had fled" (HRW Sep 1998).

According to Human Rights Watch: "At its peak in the early 1990s the ABSDF had several thousand members, of whom an estimated 2,000 were armed soldiers. However, many of the urban activists found life as jungle guerrillas too demanding or were laid low by malaria and other diseases, so they returned home or left for neighboring countries. As the 1990s progressed the ABSDF military was further undermined because the Karen National Union was less able to supply the ABSDF with weapons and other support, while the Kachin Independence Organization, after entering into a ceasefire with the [Burmese government], ordered ABSDF units out of their territory. In the late 1990s the ABSDF briefly renounced armed struggle, but later reversed this decision. [As of October 2002]...most observers estimate that they have fewer than 500 soldiers under arms, though they still have a significant political organization. The ABSDF itself claims a total of approximately 500 soldiers under arms at present, 400 of whom are based along the Burma-Thailand border while the rest are in parts of northern Burma. The

ABSDF claims that it has never conscripted soldiers, and most observers believe this claim....” (HRW Oct 2002).

The website of the Australia branch of the ABSDF describes the group as being committed to a “continuing strategy of armed resistance in combination with other political activities; education initiatives, health care programmes, research and documentation and public information” (ABSDF undated).

Information posted on the website claims that the ABSDF has been involved in various human rights trainings and in providing documentation of human rights abuses to NGOs. It also states that the ABSDF has contacts with “international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International (UK), Asia Watch (USA), the International Human Rights Law Group (USA), the Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights (USA), the International Human Rights Commission of Jurists and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (both Swiss)” (ABSDF undated).

According to a December 2001 article in THE IRRAWADDY, however, “ABSDF’s insistence on regarding itself as an active revolutionary army and not as a refugee group has always meant a rocky relationship with the NGO community. In 1997, Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) officially ceased assistance. Last year the International Rescue Committee (IRC) officially cut off funding, citing ‘a recent ABSDF memo that states it is rearming.’ In point of fact no such memo was issued, as the ABSDF has never disarmed. To be fair, though, the previous ABSDF leadership under Dr Naing Aung [removed in 2001] had gone out of its way to give the impression that it was giving up armed struggle” (IRRAWADDY Dec 2001). Corroborating information was not found in sources available to the RIC within the constraints of this research.

For further background information on the ABSDF, see the website of the organization’s Australia Branch <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3190/factab.htm> and the September 1998 Human Rights Watch report BURMA/THAILAND: UNWANTED AND UNPROTECTED: BURMESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND <http://www.hrw.org/reports98/thai/Thai989-04.htm>.

ACTIVITIES OF THE ALL BURMA STUDENTS’ DEMOCRATIC FRONT (ABSDF)

Specific information to confirm or deny whether members of the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF) participate or have participated in terrorist activity has not been found in sources available to the Resource Information Center (RIC) within the constraints of this research.

As of October 30, 2005, the ABSDF is not listed on the U.S. Department of State’s Terrorist Exclusion List <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/2004/32678.htm> or list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm>, nor is it listed on the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s list of organizations and individuals designated under Executive Order 13224 <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/sanctions/t11ter.pdf>.

Information on incidents of specific ABSDF offensive military operations was not located in sources available to the RIC within the constraints of this research.

The following is excerpted from an 8 May 2002 ABSDF press release: “On May 6 [2002] approximately 600 Burmese troops...assaulted the Wei Gyi area, where ABSDF and KNU [Karen National Union] camps are located. So far, six clashes have occurred between the Burmese troops and those of the ABSDF and KNU. Eight Burmese soldiers have been killed and 28 injured. No casualties from the opposition side have yet been reported.... The chairperson of the ABSDF, Than Khe, said ‘The Burmese military has attacked our camps almost every year....’ The ABSDF has been struggling against the Burmese military regime with political, military and diplomatic means alongside the KNU [Karen National Union] and other allied forces for the return of democracy in Burma” (ABSDF 8 May 2002).

The Karen National Union (KNU) is the “largest single insurgent group that continues to fight against central government rule” in Burma (GlobalSecurity.org 6 Oct 2004), and the ABSDF tends to operate in areas under KNU control. While the ABSDF has fewer than 500 men under arms, the KNU and its armed branch the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) have 10,000 men under arms backed by an armed local militia of 5,000 (HRW Oct 2002). Neither the KNU nor the KNLA is found on the aforementioned U.S. government terrorist lists (USDT 15 Feb 2005; USDOS 29 Dec 2004, 23 Mar 2005).

According to an ABSDF press release denying involvement in the October 1999 takeover of the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand: “The ABSDF is an organization well known in recent years for its non-violent strategies, active only in creating civil mass movement opposition to the military junta. It is evident that the ABSDF has never had a history of terrorist activity in the past and will never in the future” (ABSDF 1999). The siege of the embassy reportedly was carried out by former ABSDF members who called themselves the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors (HRW Oct 2002).

Information posted on the Australia Branch of the ABSDF website states, however, that “[t]he political problems in Burma will not be solved if the regime remains inflexible and power-mad. The ABSDF will have to continue its armed struggle as one of the means necessary to fulfill the political needs of the movement. We will work hand-in-hand with the people of Burma and the international community” (ABSDF undated).

In another press release, the ABSDF responds to Burmese government accusations that the group was involved in Christmas 1996 bombings in Burma which resulted in the deaths of five people and injuries to 17 others: “While we still maintain forces for defence purposes along the Thai-Burma border, the ABSDF considers the use of terrorism to be inimical to our aims, and has therefore adopted non-violent political defiance strategies in order to achieve our goal” (ABSDF 27 Dec 1996).

The U.S. Department of State, in reporting claims by the Government of Burma of terrorist acts committed in Burma, states: “The GOB blamed exile opposition groups for the incidents, as it has done in the past, but provided no convincing evidence to prove its allegations” (USDOS 29 Mar 2005).

According to the website of the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism: “The state-controlled media in Burma reports that the ABSDF usually attacks Buddhist ceremonies, local markets, and high traffic areas. Numerous terrorist incidents have been linked to the ABSDF and other pro-democracy groups. Most recently, a string of attacks occurring in the capital of Rangoon in 2005 was blamed on the ABSDF. However, the extent of the ABSDF’s responsibility for these attacks (and overall classification as a terrorist organization) is debatable, as the SPDC has a bad habit of branding all political opposition with the now-trendy label of ‘terrorist’. Some members of the diplomatic community believe that these so-called terrorist attacks may even be planned and executed by the ruling junta to frame and de-legitimize the ABSDF, which the regime perceives to be a threat to its tight grip on Burmese political power. Others allege that these attacks serve to attract attention away from Burma’s widespread poverty, economic woes, and a lack of progress along the ‘roadmap for democracy’ that is often cited by the SPDC ‘transitional government’ to legitimize its rule” (MIPT updated 24 Oct 2005). The website lists the “current goals” of the ABSDF as “establishing democratic rule in Burma...through...traditionally-peaceful grassroots methods despite government propaganda campaigns and strict restrictions on the group’s activities” (MIPT updated 24 Oct 2005).

The following information is excerpted from a report published by the Australian National University and written by an Australian expert on Burma who has served as a diplomat in that country and who has published several books on the subject. The report does not mention specifically the ABSDF. “After the 1988 democratic uprising [in Burma] was crushed, some exiled students briefly considered launching a terrorist campaign against the SLOFC. Treated with suspicion by most ethnic insurgent groups, and without the resources to establish a viable guerrilla group of their own, they saw no other way to hit back at the new military government. However, as a rule, Burma’s armed dissident and insurgent groups have relied on traditional guerrilla strategies to pursue their respective political agendas. They have placed a priority on winning the hearts and minds of the local population and protecting their supporters from indiscriminate violence by the regime, both aims which stand at odds with conventional terror tactics. In addition, Burma’s insurgent groups have wanted the approval and support of the wider international community...” (Selth Aug 2003, 23-4).

The report further states: “...[T]here have been surprisingly few examples in Burma of the kind of violent campaigns now popularly associated with modern terrorist groups. Over the past 15 years the US State Department’s annual review of global terrorism...has rarely mentioned any such incidents in Burma.... From time to time, however, there have been attacks against civilian targets in Burma and Burmese targets abroad that most observers would describe as ‘terrorist’ in nature.... Citing these and other incidents, the military government in Rangoon has long complained about the ‘terrorist attacks’ that ‘the Burmese people’ have had to endure at the hands of ...insurgent groups. ‘Terrorist’ has become a standard term of abuse used by the regime to denigrate its opponents and their policies...” (Selth Aug 2003, 23-4).

The following examples of reporting of ABSDF involvement in bombings and other incidents is not intended to be exhaustive nor representative of all such reporting.

Agence France Presse. “ABSDF Denies Involvement in Bombing at Tin Oo's Home” (8 Apr 1997), FBIS.

Amnesty International USA. “Myanmar: A Challenge for the International Community” (undated),
http://www.amnestyusa.org/racial_profiling/document.do?id=10BC07B4C6A0795280256900006932E4 [Accessed 30 Oct 2005]

BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific. “Burmese government blames students, communists for 4 August blasts” (7 Aug 2003) [WESTLAW]

Democratic Voice of Burma [Oslo]. “Burma Arrests 50 Former Members of Pro-Democracy Group ABSDF” (17 May 2005), FBIS.

MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base. “ALL BURMA STUDENTS’ DEMOCRATIC FRONT (ABSDF) ATTACKED DIPLOMATIC TARGET (APR. 26, 1993, BURMA)” (3 Apr 2001),
<http://www.tkb.org/Incident.jsp?incID=7062> [Accessed 14 Dec 2004]

MYANMAR ALIN [Rangoon]. “Burma paper accuses Burmese 'fugitives' in U.S. of being 'terrorists'” (27 Nov 2001), FBIS.

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In February 1992, at a camp in Kachin State, 15 ABSDF members were killed by members of the same organization (IRRAWADY 5 Jun 2002, Smith 10 Dec 1992, HRW Sep 1998). The incident is referred to as murder, as an internal purge, and as capital punishment involving arrest and killing by the ABSDF of 15 of its own members on charges of spying. At the time of the killings, the ABSDF had already split into two factions— one headed by Dr. Naing Aung and the other by Moe Thee Zun. The killings were committed by the Naing Aung faction (IRRAWADY 5 Jun 2002).

In an interview, Naing Aung confirmed that his organization had imposed the death penalty against its own members but “not often.” He further stated that in the mid 1990s the ABSDF had developed an independent judiciary (IRRAWADY May 1999).

The following information on the February 1992 incident is excerpted from a June 2002 article in THE IRRAWADY— a news magazine published in Thailand by Burmese citizens living in exile. “More than ten years later, many dissidents who still belong to the ABSDF are reluctant to discuss the crimes in the jungle for fear of opening old wounds as the incident has come back to haunt former ABSDF chairman, Dr Naing Aung. Poised to study at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government later this year, Dr Naing Aung’s scholarship was deferred indefinitely after Harvard learned of his alleged role in the executions from protest letters sent by human rights activists and professed victims of the ABSDF’s crimes. In recent years, three

former prominent ABSDF members have been granted scholarships at Harvard” (IRRAWADY Jun 2002).

“...A former ABSDF colleague now living in a Western country commented that Dr Naing Aung may not have ordered the killings but could be guilty of protecting the executioners. Aung Naing, who was then chairman of the northern ABSDF...told *The Irrawaddy* that they executed 15 ABSDF members for working as spies for the military regime. He said about 80 members had been detained on similar espionage charges since mid-1991. But some believe that the internal purges actually claimed many more lives. Moreover, some have come out recently admitting that suspects were tortured in detention. A senior ABSDF member, who was an eyewitness to the event, said that besides the 15 who were executed about five to 10 people died due to torture during the interrogation...” (IRRAWADY 5 Jun 2002). Corroborating information could not be found in sources available to the RIC within the constraints of this research.

This report was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Date: 21 July 2006

Subject: Burma: Information on Language of Instruction in Karen National Union (KNU) Schools and in Karen-Controlled Areas of Burma in the 1980s and Early 1990s

From: USCIS Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.

Keywords: Burma

Query: What was the language of instruction in KNU-run schools in Htoo Wah Lu, Burma, and in the KNU school in Mergui Tavoy District of the Karen State in the 1980s, and at the teacher training school in Huakaloke in the late 1980s and early 1990s?

If information on these particular schools is not available, to what degree was Burmese the language of instruction in KNU-run schools, or in Karen-controlled areas, during that time period? To what degree was Karen the language of instruction in these schools during that time period?

Response:

According to the British newspaper THE GUARDIAN: "A year after Burma won independence from Britain in 1948, the Karen National Union (KNU) took up arms for a homeland in the eastern Karen state through its Karen National Liberation Army. Its estimated force of up to 6,000 is the largest fighting Burma's military dictatorship, which has ruled since 1962. More than 1 million people from Karen's [sic] population of 7 million have fled since 1988, many into Thailand, and more than 2 million endure forced labour and extortion. Civilian support for the KNU is strong but more as a means to resist Burma's junta than out of a desire for independence" (GUARDIAN 23 May 2006).

Information on the particular schools in question was not available to the Resource Information Center (RIC) within the constraints of this research. The questions can nevertheless be addressed more generally.

Government-run schools in Burma are prohibited from using any domestic language other than Burmese. The study of Burma's other languages is explicitly forbidden in government-run schools (BURMA ISSUES 10 Aug 2005). This was confirmed by two experts on Burma— a

professor of Asian studies at Georgetown University, and a representative of U.S. Campaign for Burma (Asian Studies professor 2 Jun 2006; U.S. Campaign for Burma representative 2 Jun, 21 Jul 2006).

According to the same experts, schools in the areas of Karen (also known as Kayin) State (see attached map) controlled by the KNU during the 1980s and early 1990s instructed students in Karen, Burmese, and English. Instruction was primarily in Karen, with Burmese and English being secondary or peripheral. One reason the schools did not rely on Karen alone, they concurred, is that the several dialects of Karen are sufficiently different to be partially unintelligible to each other. The experts compared the situation to a Spaniard trying to understand Portuguese, or vice versa (Asian Studies professor 2 Jun 2006, U.S. Campaign for Burma representative 2 Jun 2006).

The RIC also consulted a representative of the human rights organization Earthrights (ERI), who is a native Karen who lived in the region during the period in question. He said the common language of instruction in the KNU-run schools was a literate form of Karen known as “Sa Kaw,” the written form of the language habitually used by educators and scholars (ERI representative 5 Jun 2006).

That pattern continues to hold in the remote parts of eastern Burma still controlled by the KNU. The following description is from a school in the Nyaunglebin district of Karen State. One of the authors is a Thailand-based researcher, the other a member of the Karen mobile teacher training team: “Using a bamboo ‘blackboard,’ Naw Eh Wah, a petite 24-year-old teacher with a baby sleeping on her back, shows a group of students how to subtract fractions. She then directs the students to practice individually while she tends to another small group, her eighth grade English class. Her colleague, 26-year-old Naw Wah Wah, uses the other side of the blackboard to write a few sentences in the Karen language. She explains a nicety of grammar to her class of seventh-graders while occasionally overseeing the students in the other corner of the classroom, who are studying Burmese” (IRIWADDY Jan 2004).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Attachments

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Response to Information Request**Number:** MMR06002.ZAR**Date:** 27 September 2006**Subject:** Burma: Information on Treatment of Deportees**From:** USCIS Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.**Keywords:** Burma

Query:

Please provide information on the situation of individuals who are deported/removed to Burma and on the process of returning individuals to Burma. For instance, if an individual has refugee or asylum status in the U.S., is this disclosed to the Burmese authorities? The individual in question was granted refugee status due to claimed pro-democracy activism while a student in Burma.

Response:

Information regarding the treatment of persons who have been accorded refugee or asylum status and who have been subsequently returned to Burma was not found in sources available to the Resource Information Center (RIC) within the constraints of this research. Likewise, no information was found concerning the ability or inclination of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the ruling group in Burma, to monitor the activities of Burmese citizens outside of Burma. Sources indicate that persons in refugee camps who are returned may face abuse, but there was no claim that the abuse would be because of their having left Burma. Rather, the observation is that the same poor human rights conditions that caused them to leave the country still exist in Burma (IPS 2004, HRW 25 Feb 2004).

A July 2001 RIC Query Response entitled "Burma: Information on Exit and Return" quotes a representative of the US Committee for Refugees in stating: "those who return to Burma with an expired passport, and those who have 'caused embarrassment' to the government, e.g., applied for asylum abroad, could be immediately jailed upon return to the country [if the Burmese government becomes aware of the embarrassment to the regime]" (INS-RIC 12 Jul 2006).

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) Supervisory Detention and Removal Officer who oversees removals to Burma, when removing (deporting) to Burma (or indeed any country) an individual with asylum or refugee status, all documentation that accompanies the individual being removed is sanitized of any information to suggest the individual's U.S. immigration status as an asylee or refugee. The accepting authorities are informed that the individual entered the U.S. as an immigrant, that the individual committed a crime that rendered him or her removable from the U.S., and that a final order of removal was issued against the individual. Documentation such as passport (expired), birth certificate, family registry, national ID card may also accompany the individual being

removed. Likewise, U.S. government officials (in the case of removals to Burma— the ICE attaché in Bangkok) are prohibited from revealing or discussing in any way with the receiving authorities information related to the individual's refugee or asylum claim (ICE-DRO 26 Sep 2006).

Recent news indicates that Burmese authorities continue to be interested in activities of student and other pro-democracy activists in the country (IRAWADDY 27 Sep 2006, VOA 25 Apr 2006).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Response to Information Request**Number:** MMR07007.WAS**Date:** 17 May 2007**Subject:** Burma: Information on Burmese military, Embassy Personnel, MFA**From:** USCIS, Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.**Keywords:** Burma

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- Query:**
1. What does the Burmese military do with reports regarding dissidents from abroad, especially for the period August 1998 - September 2003?
 2. Provide information on surveillance of demonstrators in front of the Embassy of Burma in Washington, DC, from August 1998 - September 2003.
 3. Provide information on the selection of officers to serve as attaché for the Burmese government. Does political affiliation play a role?
 4. Provide information on Burmese officers who refuse to conduct surveillance and write reports for the Burmese government.

Response:

For background information on monitoring of overseas Burmese by Burmese officials, please see the following:

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Resource Information Center (RIC). "Burma (Myanmar): Treatment of Deported Dissidents" (9 Mar 2004, MMR04002.ZNY), 5 p., available on the Asylum Virtual Library at <http://z02rscow12:8080/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-10356/20040309%20Burma%20Myanmar%20Treatment%20of%20Deported%20Dissidents.pdf>

U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Resource Information Center (RIC). "Burma/Myanmar. Information on 1) Existing Exit Control Procedures of the Burmese government, 2) Whether the Government Maintains Lists of Political Dissidents, and the Ability of a Government Opponent to Obtain an Exit Permit" (1 Feb 1999, MMR99001.ZNY), 4 p., available on the Asylum Virtual Library at <http://z02rscow12:8080/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-10270/19990201%20Burma%20Myanmar%20Information%201%20Whether%20the%20Government.pdf>

1. What does the Burmese military do with reports regarding dissidents from abroad, especially for the period August 1998 - September 2003?

Within the constraints of this research, it was not possible to identify precisely what the Burmese military does with such reports. Yet information from credible sources establishes the existence of such reports, and implies that an unfavorable report can potentially have serious consequences.

The Burmese military — the *Tatmadaw* — has a very extensive intelligence network that keeps track of dissent among Burmese living abroad as well as within Burma. According to a December 2000 report by the Brussels-based International Crisis Group,

The Tatmadaw's pervasive intelligence apparatus underpins its ability to maintain the regime's grip on the country. Enormous resources and effort are put into the surveillance of all potential enemies and dissidents, "above ground" and "underground", at home and abroad. A dramatic expansion of military intelligence capabilities since the 1990s has permitted it to monitor and counter potential threats to its power, including from its own personnel. ... The regime's widespread use of informers within Burma/Myanmar and in emigre communities overseas has created a climate of fear and suspicion because people are frequently uncertain who is an informer and who is safe to trust (ICG 21 Dec 2000).

According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*,

The activities of the DDSI [Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence] are very wide-ranging. Its principal task had originally been to manage military intelligence operations, particularly with respect to the armed insurgent groups. In the 1980s, it became much more concerned with the investigation and suppression of political dissent and of other activities seen as posing a threat to state security. All intelligence sources and means are employed ... Personal dossiers are maintained on known and suspected dissidents in Burma, members of the diplomatic community and even critics of the regime who live abroad. The DDSI also administers more than a dozen detention and interrogation centres across the country, some of which have become notorious for torture and killing (Jane's 1 Mar 1998).

2. Provide information on surveillance of demonstrators in front of the Embassy of Burma in Washington, DC, from August 1998 - September 2003.

Several reports of protests at the Burmese Embassy were found for this period. None made any mention of surveillance, but opposition groups reported that members of military intelligence were dispatched to the Washington embassy to monitor the activities of exiles.

On 27 October 1998, some forty to fifty supporters of the Free Burmese Coalition demonstrated at the Burmese Embassy in the 2300 block of S Street NW. When ordered to move by the police, thirteen men and women shackled their necks to the embassy fence with bicycle locks. After firefighters used electric saws to disengage them, the protestors were arrested and charged with violating a federal law aimed at protecting foreign embassies (*Washington Post* 27 Oct 1998, *Washington Times* 27 Oct 1998).

On 20 June 2003, a “small but vocal group of protestors” gathered outside the Burmese Embassy to mark the 58th birthday of imprisoned opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Several demonstrators were arrested after trespassing on embassy property (Channel NewsAsia 20 June 2003).

On 8 August 2003, about 70 demonstrators held a protest across the street from the Burmese Embassy while three women from the same group climbed a ladder to an embassy balcony to unfurl a banner calling for the expulsion of Ambassador U Linn Myaing. Embassy staffers seized the women, who were subsequently arrested by US diplomatic security officers. As in the previous accounts, there was no mention of surveillance (*Washington Times* 8 Aug 2003).

According to the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), however, Aung Lynn Htut, “a member of the notorious Military Intelligence Service (MIS)” was assigned to the Burmese embassy in Washington, DC to “spy on Burmese citizens and democracy activists” in the United States (DVB 3 April 2005). According to Aung Din, policy director and co-founder of the U.S. Campaign for Burma, Aung Lynn Htut’s primary assignment at the embassy was to monitor the activities of Burmese exiles (*Washington Post* 7 Apr 2005).

3. Provide information on the selection of officers to serve as attaché for the Burmese government. Does political affiliation play a role?

No information that would directly answer this question was found within the constraints of this research. The following information from the U.S. Department of State report on human rights in Burma for the year 2003 provides insight into the Burmese government’s concerns for security and acute sensitivity to contact with foreigners in the context of foreign criticism of the regime.

The Government’s intelligence services also monitored the movements of foreigners and questioned citizens about conversations with foreigners. Government employees generally were required to obtain advance permission before meeting with foreigners. During the year, international NGOs officially were required to ensure that a representative from a government ministry accompanied them on all field visits (at the NGOs’ expense). Though the requirement was impractical and was not always enforced, it was more fully enforced during times of official anxiety about democratic opposition activities. Diplomatic missions were at times also subjected to the requirement. ... The Government also carefully scrutinized prospective travel abroad (USDOS 25 Feb 2004).

4. Provide information on Burmese officers who refuse to conduct surveillance and write reports for the Burmese government.

No such information was found within the constraints of this research.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Attachments

None.

Response to Information Request**Number:** MMR07008.ZAR**Date:** 17 September 2007**Subject:** Burma: Information on Freedom Fighters of Burma (FFB) / National Freedom Fighters of Burma (NFFB)**From:** USCIS, Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.**Keywords:** Burma**Query:** Provide information on the types of activities the Freedom Fighters of Burma (FFB)/ National Freedom Fighters of Burma (NFFB) engaged in.

Provide the dates the FFB/ NFFB were active and whether they are affiliated with any organization that has been designated a terrorist group or that engaged in violent/ armed activities.

Response:

In the resources available to the Resource Information Center (RIC), there was very little credible information found about the underground organization Freedom Fighters of Burma (FFB) or National Freedom Fighters of Burma (NFFB), and no detailed information was found regarding the structure or activities of FFB/ NFFB. The FFB and NFFB are not mentioned in a June 2005 Amnesty International report on political prisoners in Burma (AI 16 Jun 2005.)

The organizations that FFB/ NFFB allegedly were aligned with (Alliance for Democratic Solidarity of the Union of Burma, All-Burma Students' Democratic Front, All Burma Students Union Reorganizing Body), according to a Burmese-government radio broadcast [see below], do not appear on terrorist group designation lists produced by the U.S. Departments of State and Treasury (USDOS 29 Dec 2004, 11 Oct 2005; OFAC 19 Dec 2006). For more information on the All-Burma Students' Democratic Front, see RIC Query Response MMR05001.NSC, *Burma: Information on the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)*, available on the Asylum Virtual Library (AVL) at the following link:

<http://z02rscow12:8080/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-63624/MMR05001.NSC.doc>

The following web address purports to link to the website of the Australia branch of the ABSDF <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3190/index.html>

The alleged founder of NFFB is U Ye Htoon, although various spellings may include U Ye Tun and U Ye Htun.

A BBC report from September 12, 1989, quotes a lengthy press conference that took place on September 9, 1989, with State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) First Secretary Brigadier General Khin Nyunt. The BBC article is a rough translation of a radio broadcast (Rangoon home service 1330 gmt) that alternates between a first and third person narrative. The article expresses the opinions and puts forward accusations of the Burmese militia, and thus its

credibility is highly questionable. In the press conference, Nyunt states that U Ye Tun had formed the underground youth organization called NFFB (National Freedom Fighters of Burma) and was striving to cause unrest in the country; the National Intelligence Bureau had called in and interrogated him. The BBC article states:

The National Freedom Fighters of Burma [NFFB] was secretly formed. The key people in charge of that organization were Thura Soe, alias Thein Aung, [words indistinct] now under arrest. U Ye Tun was providing financial assistance to that organization also. Hence, we can guess the importance of U Ye Tun's role...

Zali Maw and Myint Thein, alias Pyi Thein, of the ADSB [Alliance for Democratic Solidarity of the Union of Burma] directly controlled the NFFB. The organization investigated military installations in Rangoon and movements of political parties. U Ye Tun provided funds monthly for NFFB operations. The organization had to gather information locally and send it back to Bo Khin Maung, send members to the border areas to attend demolition training, and create instability in the country by using these trained sappers to cause explosions throughout the country.

The ADSB sent arms in Upper Burma through the KIA [Kachin Independence Army]. We understand that they also plan to conduct training courses in KIA areas. Under the present situation, the NFFB is recruiting new members and conducting intelligence missions in KIA areas. The publications and [words indistinct] by that organization are on display...

In addition, we discovered that through U Ye Tun, the ABSDF [All-Burma Students' Democratic Front based in the border areas] had established contacts with the Ma-Ka-Tha-Pha [All Burma Students Union Reorganising Body]. All of these links were facilitated with the financial support and assistance of a major embassy in Rangoon. Since 31st July 1989, the National Intelligence Bureau had arrested and interrogated 52 people, including U Ye Tun.

U Ye Tun became friendly with Min Zeya [student leader] because of his intimacy with members of the Ma-Ka-Da [All-Burma Students Democracy Movement]. He gave encouragement and advice to the Ma-Ka-Da (BBC 12 Sep 1989).

The RIC reached out to a Burma expert who is a journalist and author and has written articles and a book on Burmese armed groups, as well as materials for Minority Rights Group International. The expert provided by email the following information about the National Freedom Fighters of Burma:

The then "SLORC" government did in 1989 accuse a well-known intellectual and businessman, U Ye Htoon, of forming a group under this name [NFFB] as part of a pro-Western conspiracy to seditiously solicit support for armed struggle against the military government. In case you have not seen, the allegations are made in a 1989 book: "The Conspiracy of Treasonous Minions Within the Myanmar Naing-Ngan and Traitorous Cohorts Abroad": pp.107-8.

I very much doubt if this has any connection to the contemporary network that have been using this name to draw attention to the NUPA [National Party of Arakan] and KNU [Karen National Union] prisoners in India. National Freedom Fighters of Burma is a pretty general description that many anti-government militant groups could use/have used for their aspirations and causes over the past two decades.

With regard [to] the 1989 allegations by the SLORC, these are also suspect. At the time, many small and often spontaneous anti-military government groups were formed during the turbulent fall-out from the 1988 events [military coup in Burma]. Eventually, the most hardline came to coalesce in the All Burma Students Democratic Front on the Thai, China, Bangladesh and India borders. During 1988-90, a few other militant factions also continued in the borderlands that proclaimed armed struggle, but they gradually petered out.

In addition, as today, the military government often makes broad accusations of insurgent or terrorist connections among activist groups inside the country. Thus individual allegations need to be looked at very closely.

...If the situation you are looking at does involve this 1989 grouping, they were indeed mentioned by the government at the time but did not become more widely known during what was a very confused period.

Incidentally, after several years' imprisonment, U Ye Htoon is— I believe— still at liberty in Yangon... (Journalist 18 Sep 2007).

Although a copy of the 1989 book *The Conspiracy of Treasonous Minions within the Myanmar Naing-ngan and Traitorous Cohorts Abroad* could not be accessed by the RIC, an article in *Asian Survey* (June 1997) describes the book as follows:

The SLORC worldview, as expressed in the state-run newspaper, *New Light of Myanmar*, and in publications such as *The Conspiracy of Treasonous Minions within the Myanmar Naing-ngan and Traitorous Cohorts Abroad*, published in 1989 by the Ministry of Information, not only emphasizes the negative aspects of British colonialism but constructs an international environment full of foreign (chiefly Western) enemies yearning to re-enslave the Burmese nation (*Asian Survey* Jun 1997).

According to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada's report "Information on Karen Rebels and Students in Myanmar (ex-Burma)" from 1 June 1989:

After the 1988 student riots and the following repression, thousands of students fled from Burma fearing reprisals by the government; many fled to Thailand, from where they were later forcibly returned. Various reports indicate that students returning to Burma under a government amnesty were detained and tortured; at least one died soon after his release. Street demonstrations in Burma are reported to have resumed six months after the events following the military coup of September 1988, but on a smaller scale.

The relationship between student organizations and the Karen rebels is not clear; although the leader of the All-Burma Federation of Students' Unions (ABFSU) denied any involvement in an "armed struggle", the accompanying report indicates the existence of contacts between the rebels and the ABFSU (IRB 1 Jun 1989).

As mentioned in the U.S. Department of State report on human rights in Burma during 1993, an individual named Ye Htoon (a prodemocracy businessman) who had been imprisoned since 1990, was released from prison in April 1992. It is unknown to the RIC team if this individual is the same person who may have founded the FFB/ NFFB. The report states:

After denying for years that it held any political prisoners, in April 1992, the Government announced its intention to free those persons "detained politically" who did not represent a threat to state security. Between that time and the end of 1993, the SLORC announced the release of more than 2,000 persons, although fewer than 200 were publicly identified. The failure to identify most released persons invites suspicions about whether they were actually political prisoners, but opposition activists believe this was generally the case. Reliable sources indicate that some of those released in 1993 were monks imprisoned for participating in 1988 prodemocracy rallies and a 1990 boycott action, including prominent Rangoon Abbot Thu Mingala; prodemocracy businessman Ye Htoon; and numerous Karens and others suspected of supporting the 1991 Irrawaddy Delta insurgency (USDOS Feb 1994).

Regarding the treatment of Returned Students/Dissidents and Former Political Prisoners, the DOS Burma: Profile of Asylum Claims and Country Conditions from April 2007, states:

To the best of our knowledge, students and other political dissidents, including former armed insurgents, have encountered few difficulties upon return to Burma or release from jail as long as they maintain a low profile. They can, however, expect that Burmese authorities will subject them to the same arbitrary treatment given other citizens. Historically, returnees have spent a few weeks or a few months in detention in a military intelligence facility immediately upon return. Thereafter, they -- like released political prisoners -- will likely be under active watch by the authorities for at least several months. Returned dissidents and former political prisoners almost invariably find themselves denied entry into Burma's vast civil service and facing constrained job opportunities. Admission to a university is, however, possible. Dissidents who re-enter the active opposition court, at a minimum, active government harassment which can lead to another detention (USDOS Apr 2007).

Recent news indicates that Burmese authorities continue to be interested in activities of student and other pro-democracy activists in the country (IRAWADDY 27 Sep 2006, VOA 25 Apr 2006).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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U.S. Department of State (USDOS), Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," Fact Sheet (11 Oct 2005), <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm> [Accessed 10 Sep 2007]

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[Accessed 27 Sep 2006]

Attachments

None.

Response to Information Request**Number:** MMR08006.DAL**Date:** 23 July 2008**Subject:** Burma: Information on Family Members of Political Opponents**From:** USCIS, Asylum, Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.**Keywords:** Burma

Query: Is there information available to indicate that the Government of Burma would deny (or has denied in the past) a license to practice medicine to a graduate of the Institute of Medicine in Mandalay whose siblings were political protesters who left the country in the 1990s and received asylum abroad (in the U.S.)?

Response:

Searches of information available to the Resource Information Center (RIC) within the constraints of this response did not reveal information at the level of requested specificity, but did produce evidence that the Burmese military government has taken action against family members of political opponents of the regime — in one case of an opponent residing in the USA — throughout the past decade.

According to the State Department report on human rights in Burma during 2007,

The government punished family members for alleged violations by individuals.

In August authorities detained and interrogated the brother of prodemocracy leader Htay Kywe when they were unable to locate Htay Kywe following a series of peaceful protests. The brother was released the next morning. The brother of another activist was forced by authorities to sell his transportation business at a great loss due to his sibling's activities.

On October 1, authorities arrested Khin Mar Lar. At the time the regime was seeking to arrest her husband, poet Ko Nyein Thit. Authorities held Khin Mar Lar without charge until October 21. She was not otherwise wanted or accused of having committed any crimes. Police subsequently arrested Ko Nyein Thit, who remained in custody at year's end.

On October 10, police detained the mother and mother-in-law of Thet Thet Aung, whom they sought in connection with her alleged role in September's peaceful prodemocracy protests. Authorities released her mother-in-law shortly after Thet Thet Aung was arrested on October 19 but held her mother until November 2 without charge. Neither her mother nor mother-in-law were otherwise wanted by the authorities or alleged to have committed any crimes.

On the night of October 16, security officials arrested the mother and two brothers of activist monk U Gambira in their home. Another of his brothers, Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw, was arrested the next day as he tended to HIV patients in a Rangoon clinic. On November 4, authorities also arrested U Gambira's father. At the time authorities were seeking to arrest U Gambira for his alleged role in September's protests. His family members were held for several weeks without charges before being released. None of U Gambira's detained family members were alleged to have committed any crimes or were otherwise wanted by the authorities.

In his December report, [UN Special Rapporteur Paulo Sergio] Pinheiro stated these cases violated international law and constituted hostage taking in that they applied explicit or implicit pressure on the wanted person to come forward as a condition for releasing or not harming the hostage (USDOS 11 Mar 2008).

In its 2003 annual report, the Paris-based Reporters without Borders (*Reporters sans frontières*, RSF) stated: "While arrests of the regime's opponents became more and more infrequent, telephone tapping and harassment of family members became commonplace" (RSF 2003). In particular it cited the case of a dissident grandson of one of the heroes of Burmese independence:

Known by the pseudonym Cho Seint, Kyaw San was transferred to Tharrawaddy in May 1997. He was sentenced to seven years in prison for supporting the 1996 student demonstrations in his articles and poems, published in opposition magazines. He was badly beaten during interrogation at the start of 1997 and has been partially deaf ever since. He is the grandson of Thakin Kotaw Hmime, one of the fathers of independence along with Gen. Aung San. The military has deliberately deprived his family of resources, and he was receiving almost no visits or help from outside prison (RSF 2003).

In May 2005, the Burmese government named Aung Din, a prominent dissident who is policy director for the US Campaign for Burma, as a suspect in deadly bomb attacks in Rangoon, even though he is in exile in the United States. The Thailand-based Irrawaddy web site reported:

According to informed sources, Aung Din's family members living in Burma were briefly detained by authorities. Aung Din has denied the government charge against him (Irrawaddy 7 Jun 2005).

In early February 2008, U.S. actor Sylvester Stallone told the Associated Press that family members of two Burmese actors in the latest "Rambo" movie have been arrested:

While the film has yet to be formally released in Asia, Stallone said he's heard reports that Myanmar police have prohibited DVD sellers from stocking pirated copies. Stallone also said two of the film's actors, who are from the country formerly known as Burma, told him that family members have been arrested.

It was not immediately possible to confirm the claims. ...

The fourth “Rambo” has the disaffected Vietnam vet trying to find missionaries captured by Myanmar soldiers, who are shown razing villages and killing civilians.

Stallone filmed the movie on a river bordering Myanmar and neighboring Thailand (AP 2 Feb 2008).

In late February 2008, the Burmese government reportedly arrested three family members of participants in the 88 Generation Students group: Thanda Win, the wife of Mya Aye, a leader of the 88 Generation Students group; Hla Moe, the husband of 88 group member Mie Mie; and Kanet, the brother of Marky, an 88 group member (Irrawaddy 3 Mar 2008).

As long ago as July 1999, the Associated Press reported that the government arrested eight family members of democracy activist Kyaw Wunna, including his three-year-old daughter, when they were unable to locate him (AP 26 Jul 1999).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Response to Information Request**Number:** MMR09001.SCO**Date:** 28 October 2008**Subject:** Burma: Information on the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)**From:** USCIS, Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.**Keywords:** Myanmar /**Query:** Provide information on the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), including acts of violence the group has been involved in or accused of since its foundation.**Response:****Founding of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)**

Following the September 1988 military crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations in Burma, in which thousands of unarmed protestors were killed, eight to ten thousand student activists and others fled to the Burma/Thailand border areas controlled by ethnic minority armed opposition groups— particularly the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) (HRW Oct 2002, Jane's 23 Sep 2008).

On 1 November 1988, the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) was formed at Wangkha, which was at that time a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) camp (HRW Oct 2002, Jane's 23 Sep 2008). Human Rights Watch (HRW) wrote in 1998:

...[The ABSDF was] formed...to carry on the fight against the SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] by armed rebellion.... Most [ABSDF members] were ethnic Burmans, many were young men, and while many were students, there were also graduates, doctors, workers, teachers, and other professionals among their ranks... (HRW Sep 1998).

While Human Rights Watch stated in the above report that the ABSDF was created as an armed rebel group, a 1992 Asia Watch [later Human Rights Watch] report stated that “[a]lthough there were many Burmese dissidents willing to take up arms alongside the minority insurgents [such as the KNLA], ABSDF initially remained an unarmed organization” (Asia Watch 20 Mar 1992). In sources available to the USCIS Resource Information Center (RIC) within the constraints of this research, this is the only report found that states there was an early period in the ABSDF's history in which it was not an armed group. Exactly when the group took up arms, if it was not always armed, also was not found in readily available sources.

ABSDF Goals and Activities

Undated information posted on the website of the Australia branch of the ABSDF states: “In order to fulfill its aims and objectives, the ABSDF upholds the strategy, ‘Armed struggle in combination with political activities’ ” (ABSDF undated).

Many of the original 1988 activists who fled to the border regions returned to urban areas, due largely to diseases and harsh rural living conditions (HRW Sep 1998, Jane’s 23 Sep 2008). Those who remained trained with and fought alongside the Karen National Union (KNU)’s Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and also with the Karenni Army (KA) (*Irrawaddy* 8 Apr 2004, Jane’s 23 Sep 2008). “At its peak in the early 1990s the ABSDF had several thousand members, of whom an estimated 2,000 were armed soldiers” (HRW Oct 2002). Information on the duties/activities of those ABSDF members who were not armed soldiers was not found in sources available to the RIC, but information on other ABSDF activities is included in a separate section below.

The Burmese opposition group Democratic Voice of Burma, and other sources, indicate that the ABSDF, alongside ethnic minority armed groups, has engaged in armed clashes with the Burmese army. In sources available to the RIC, the most recent mention of a specific incident is a Democratic Voice of Burma report dated January 2005 (DVB 18 Jul 2000, 14 Jun 2001, 17 Jan 2005; Jane’s 23 Sep 2008; HRW Oct 2002).

The ABSDF suffered under dwindling resources through the 1990s as the Karen National Union (KNU) gradually lessened its supply of weapons and other support to the ABSDF. Moreover, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) ordered ABSDF units to leave KIO territory following a ceasefire between the latter and the Burmese government in 1994 (Jane’s 23 Sep 2008; HRW Oct 2002, p. 163-164).

The ABSDF also was wracked by internal disputes, including purges, among its ranks (Jane’s 23 Sep 2008; HRW Oct 2002, p. 163-164). Most notably, in 1992, 15 to 16 ABSDF members accused of spying against the group were executed in what became known as the “Kachin Massacre” (*Irrawaddy* 8 Apr 2004). Besides this incident, there were other reports that the ABSDF met criticism for killing its own members on charges such as rape and spying for the regime (*Irrawaddy* 8 Apr 2004, 1 May 1999; *Censorship News* 10 Dec 1992; HRW Sep 1998).

Also in 1992, the ABSDF split into the ABSDF led by Moe Thee Zun, who advocated continued armed struggle against the regime, and the ABSDF under Naing Aung Oo, who promoted increased political activism (*Irrawaddy* 8 Apr 2004). Human Rights Watch states that “both [factions]...included students committed to armed struggle” (HRW 20 Mar 1992).

Although the two ABSDF factions reunified in 1997, the organization never regained its prior strength. “Faced with limited resources, infighting and marred by some extrajudicial killings among its members, the students’ army quickly dissolved into a small force that relied heavily on larger armed ethnic groups, particularly Karen groups, and humanitarian aid agencies” (*Irrawaddy* 4 Dec 2007). “In the late 1990s, the ABSDF briefly renounced armed struggle, but later reversed this decision” (HRW 2002, p. 163-4). Information indicating the duration of the

period during which the ABSDF laid down arms was not found in sources available to the RIC within the constraints of this research. The *Irrawaddy* reported in 2004 that the ABSDF never in fact disarmed although then-leader Dr. Naing Aung had striven to give the impression that this was the case (*Irrawaddy* 8 Apr 2004). Information to confirm or deny the *Irrawaddy* report was not found in available sources.

Areas of Operation, Accusations of Violence Outside Engagement of Burmese Military

The ABSDF is described as being active on the Burma/Thailand border, in Mon and Kachin states, in northern Burma, and along Burma's border with the Indian state of Manipur (*Irrawaddy* 8 Aug 2004, Jane's 23 Sep 2008). By 2002, Human Rights Watch reported that fewer than 500 ABSDF soldiers remained under arms, with around 400 based along Burma's border with Thailand, and the rest in parts of northern Burma (HRW 2002, p. 163-164).

By 2007, "Salai Yaw Aung, the joint general-secretary (1) of the ABSDF, said his group, like many armed groups based on the border, may be involved in hit-and-run guerrilla warfare, but they no longer conduct major military operations" (*Irrawaddy* 4 Dec 2007). He also indicated that funding and recruitment are major problems (*Irrawaddy* 4 Dec 2007).

The Government of Burma accused the ABSDF of various bombings that took place between 2003 and 2005, including attacks where innocent civilians were killed (*Irrawaddy* 19 Apr 2003, 29 Dec 2004, 23 Feb 2006; HRW 18 Jan 2006). Independent confirmation of the Government of Burma's accusations was not found in sources available to the RIC within the constraints of this research. According to Jane's Information Group:

Sporadic bomb attacks throughout Myanmar are invariably blamed on political insurgent groups, in particular the ABSDF. The military junta accused the ABSDF of carrying out a number of small explosions in the first half of 2006, in addition to a number of earlier attacks, although such claims are difficult to verify and the ABSDF routinely denies any involvement....

Despite government accusations of ABSDF involvement in attacks throughout Myanmar, the group seems incapable of launching any significant military operations. The ABSDF maintains only a token force of around 100 armed activists, who concentrate on defending their camp at Weigyi opposite the Thai border town of Mae Ariang in Mae Hone Son province, while other members are medics attached to Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) units. In recent years, the Burmese student movement in exile and along the Thai-Burma border has become involved more in non-governmental organisation work than in armed resistance....

The ABSDF operates in areas along the Thai border, in northern Kachin State, and along the border between Myanmar and India's Manipur state. Currently, only a handful of armed activists remain at a few locations along the Thai-Myanmar border. The group also maintains unofficial "offices" in Thai border towns such as Mae Sot, and activists are based in Chiang Mai and Bangkok in Thailand, in the Indian capital New Delhi, and in Dhaka in Bangladesh...

...Very few from the first group of students who arrived in the border areas in 1988 remain. Most have returned to their homes in Myanmar, been resettled in the US, Australia or Europe, or are in towns in Thailand and India waiting for resettlement in third countries. However, following more student-led demonstrations in Yangon in the mid-1990s, a new wave of activists arrived on the Thai border (Jane's 23 Sep 2008).

ABSDF leader Moe Thee Zun presently lives in the United States (RFA 8 Aug 2008). According to Jane's Information Group, the ABSDF currently depends on funding from overseas members, and that while its influence in Burma has diminished, it "remains a viable political force among [Burmese] citizens in exile" (Jane's 23 Sep 2008).

Other Activities

Information posted on their website claims that the ABSDF has been involved in various human rights trainings and in providing documentation of human rights abuses to NGOs. It also states that the ABSDF has contacts with "international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International (UK), Asia Watch (USA), the International Human Rights Law Group (USA), the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (USA), the International Human Rights Commission of Jurists and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (both Swiss)" (ABSDF undated).

According to an April 2004 *Irrawaddy* article,

ABSDF's insistence on regarding itself as an active revolutionary army and not as a refugee group has always meant a rocky relationship with the NGO community. In 1997, Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) officially ceased assistance. [In 2000]... the International Rescue Committee (IRC) officially cut off funding, citing 'a recent ABSDF memo that states it is rearming.' In point of fact no such memo was issued, as the ABSDF has never disarmed. To be fair, though, the previous ABSDF leadership under Dr Naing Aung [removed in 2001] had gone out of its way to give the impression that it was giving up armed struggle (*Irrawaddy* 8 Apr 2004).

The website of the Australia branch of the ABSDF describes the group as being committed to a "continuing strategy of armed resistance in combination with other political activities; education initiatives, health care programmes, research and documentation and public information" (ABSDF undated). A 2006 research paper produced by the UN Refugee Agency indicates that the ABSDF is one of several dissident groups operating schools in refugee camps in Thailand. A 1992 Human Rights Watch report states that "[t]he ABSDF [comprised mostly of ethnic Burmans] emphasized community development programs that included the minority people" (HRW 2 Mar 1992).

Jane's Information Group reported in September 2008:

...[S]ince 2000-01 [the ABSDF has] been concentrating on political work among Myanmar exiles mainly in Thailand, India, and, to a lesser extent, in Bangladesh and China. It has lost much of its initial strength as many of its members have surrendered to

the Myanmar authorities and its influence within the country is limited, but it remains a viable political force among Myanmar citizens in exile.

...[T]he Burmese student movement in exile and along the Thai-Burma border has become involved more in non-governmental organisation work than in armed resistance. It maintains a number of websites through which it disseminates its political views and news from Burma... (Jane's 23 Sep 2008).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Attachments:

None.



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

**Country of Origin
Information Research
Section**

Response to Information Request

Number: MMR09004.ZSF

Date: 02 March 2009

Subject: Burma: Risks to Sino-Burmese and their Relations with the Burmese Government

From: USCIS, Asylum Country of Origin Information Research Service (COIRS)
Washington, D.C.

Keywords: Burma / Chinese

Query: Please provide detailed information on what sorts of political and/or economic ties exist or have developed in the last twenty years between native Sino-Burmese and the current regime.

Please indicate whether Sino-Burmese are involved in politics or the opposition, and whether or not they are at risk, as are other ethnic minorities, and if so, to what extent.

Response:

Native ethnic Chinese in Burma, as a whole, have prospered in the last 20 years, having benefited especially from the growth of trade between China and Burma. They are central to economic activity in at least two regions in Shan State, Wa and Kokang, as well as in the cities of Rangoon and Mandalay. In urban areas, no indications were found that ethnic Chinese, as a group, were politically active in support of or opposition to the government of Burma. But, as members of a non-indigenous ethnic minority, Sino-Burmese were excluded from government jobs and many advanced degree programs in universities.

In Wa State, certain Sino-Burmese experienced tension with the government of Burma because their enterprises include the cultivation of opium poppies – originally undertaken by Chinese nationalists who left the country following their defeat by the Chinese Communist Party. In various remote regions, some Sino-Burmese are involved in the manufacture of narcotics by

criminal gangs. Ethnic Chinese individuals involved in the drug trade could face risks of harm from the Burmese military.

Like other ethnic minorities, ethnic Chinese in Burma are also sometimes unable to move about the country as freely as indigenous Burmese citizens are. However, in general, evidence was not found that the Sino-Burmese faced the risks of abuse to which other minorities in Burma are subjected. Full details and documentation to follow:

As of 2003, there were reportedly about three million ethnic Chinese in Burma (World News Connection 2 Jul 2003). In the past decade, more than a million Chinese have emigrated from the adjacent parts of China into Burma (ICG 31 Jan 2008).

Burma's ethnic Chinese have reportedly benefited disproportionately from growing trade with China and other countries (*Michigan Law Review* 1 May 2004). "The inner penetration of ethnic Chinese in Burma is very deep now," according to Harvard Business School professor Tarun Khanna. He says the Chinese influence has been expanding at the expense of Indian influence, and that ethnic Chinese play a critical role in that process. "Mandalay, which used to be more or less an Indian city, is today a Chinese city ... the Indians are wiped out" (Indo-Asian News Service 24 Apr 2008). According to Amy Chua, a law professor at Yale Law School and author of the book *World on Fire: How Exporting Free-Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred & Global Instability* (2003), the Sino-Burmese are an example of a market dominant minority, an "ethnic minorit[y] who, along with foreign investors, can be expected under market conditions to economically dominate the indigenous majorities around them, at least in the near to midterm future" (American Society of International Law 1 Jan 2004).

Ethnic Chinese are a presence in rural areas and urban centers, both in the parts of Shan State where they are numerically the most prevalent ethnic minority and throughout the country. One-fifth of the population of Mandalay, the nation's second-largest city, is ethnic Chinese. Fully half the population of Lashio in the State of Shan is ethnic Chinese. In northern Burma, some 1.3 million Chinese have assumed a dominant role in the local economy (*Straits Times* 6 Oct 2007), including the mining of minerals such as rubies, jade, and sapphires (*Business Times* 9 Apr 2005, *Mineralogical Record* 1 Nov 2007). As early as 2001, ethnic Chinese dominated nearly all sectors of the economy in Mandalay (UPI 11 Dec 2001). Ethnic Chinese gangs operating in remote parts of Burma are said to manufacture large quantities of illegal synthetic drugs — primarily methamphetamine — in addition to processing opium into heroin (*China Daily* 22 Feb 2005, AFP 26 Jun 2005). The rural ethnic Chinese who inhabit the northern tip of Burma are

known as the Kokang. Under pressure from the People's Republic of China, they formally banned poppy production in the area in 2003 (*South China Morning Post* 14 Oct 2004).

Within the limits of this research, in publicly available sources, no indication was found that ethnic Chinese in Burma, as a group, are involved in politics or opposition movements. As a non-indigenous ethnic minority, limitations on their rights of citizenship included prohibition on holding government positions. In its most recent report on human rights in Burma, covering the year 2007, the U.S. Department of State said:

There were ethnic tensions between Burmans and nonindigenous ethnic populations, including South Asians, many of whom were Muslims, and a rapidly growing population of Chinese, most of whom emigrated from Yunnan Province. Chinese immigrants increasingly dominated the economy of the northern part of the country. ...

Native-born but nonindigenous ethnic populations such as Chinese, Indians, Bengalis, and some Eurasians were denied the full benefits of citizenship based on their nonindigenous ancestry.

Persons without full citizenship faced restrictions in domestic travel. They were barred from certain advanced university programs in medicine and technological fields and excluded from government positions (USDOS 11 Mar 2008).

Within the limits of this research, no direct involvement of ethnic Chinese in Burmese opposition movements was found. Some ethnic Chinese businessmen have, however, demonstrated a willingness to pay a rebel group for the protection of their businesses. In Maija Yang, up until very recently, Chinese businessmen paid rebels, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), to allow them to operate casinos. But this arrangement took place in the context of a ceasefire between the Burmese military and the KIO:

Chinese authorities have cut off electricity supply and disconnected telephone lines in the Burmese town of Maija Yang on the Sino-Burmese border, compelling thousands of Chinese businessmen to abandon the town and leave for mainland China, local residents said. A local youth said thousands of Chinese businessmen were moving away from the town to other parts of China, after electricity and telephone lines were cut off in the town since early February...

Sources in the border area said, the border town of Maija Yang is under the control of ethnic Kachin rebels -- the Kachin Independence Organization. However, the KIO, which has a ceasefire agreement with Burma's military rulers, had signed a contract with Chinese businessmen, to allow them free business operations in the town including running casinos. The source said, the KIO annually receives not less than 6 million Chinese Yuan (approximately USD 877,205) from Chinese businessmen for allowing them business operations in Maija Yang.

In the early 1990s, Maija Yang, a small village with an approximate population of about 1,000 people, was a remote and under-developed area controlled by the KIO. But following the KIO's ceasefire agreement with the ruling junta in 1994, the village transformed into a border commercial hub, filled with casinos and other businesses. "Casino gambling began in Maija Yang 6 to 7 years ago," said Mya Maung.

Meanwhile, it is still unclear why the Chinese authorities have shut down electricity supply and telephone lines in the town. According to Mya Maung, it might be due to the news of Chinese children being kidnapped and taken to Kachin state. Earlier, Chinese newspapers reported that a number of Chinese youth were being kidnapped and taken to Burma for ransom. The information, however, could not be independently verified (*Mizzima News* 12 Feb 09)[italics added].

When evaluating the availability of information on any oppositional activities of the Chinese in Burma, it should be kept in mind that, as the UNHCR observed in its 2008 report on the State of the World's Minorities – Burma (Myanmar):

Information on the involvement of ethnic minorities in the protests is hard to come by due to government restrictions on information flow out of the country. Also, ethnic minority populations are greater in rural areas and the majority of the protests took place in urban centres. However, groups such as the Karen, Karenni, Rohingya and Shan joined the protests on the Thai-Burma border and in the city of Sittwe in Rakhine State. In an October 2007 Associated Press article Karen National Union Secretary General Mahn Sha said: 'We need to work together with the Mon, other groups, the students, to oust the [junta]. We have a common enemy and common goals.' ...

The international community remains divided over the treatment of Burma – France, the UK and the US proposed tougher wording in the UN Security Council statement and continue to call for harsh sanctions, yet China and Russia successfully argued to soften the language of the statement and consistently oppose sanctions (UNHCR 2008).

In considering the risks faced by ethnic Chinese in Burma and their relationship with the Burmese government, the drug trade and other criminal activities must be separately addressed. The region of Burma, where ethnic Chinese historically have enjoyed the most political and economic independence is the part of Northern Shan State known as Wa State, a major area of poppy cultivation. Although the Wa State's independent military force has previously cooperated with the Burmese military, very recently tensions have risen considerably between the two forces.

According to the International Crisis Group, writing in 2003, ethnic Chinese have near-complete control of the State of Wa:

The Wa region for most intents and purposes today is an independent state and has much closer links with China than with the rest of Myanmar. The Wa have their own administration, their own defence force, even their own foreign affairs. The local economy is Chinese as is the administrative language; most schools teach in Chinese, and there is much Chinese investment and immigration. Yet, the Wa appear to accept the nominal authority of the Myanmar government and have cordial relations with its officials. On several occasions, the UWSA [United Wa State Army] has cooperated locally with the Myanmar army.

The UWSA, apparently content with the current arrangement, has made few political demands or statements on the future of Myanmar. However, perhaps more than any other minority organisation, the leadership appears to have a long-term strategic plan and to be well on the way to realising it. It has made significant strides toward developing its impoverished region. Several modern towns have sprung up where just a few years ago only small, traditional villages existed. Much of this development is driven by Chinese investments. The Wa also have developed extensive businesses in the main cities of central Myanmar. ...

The most controversial issue in the region is drugs. The Wa leadership under increasing pressure from the international community, the Chinese government and Yangon, has pledged to eradicate opium by 2005 and appears to be interested in shedding its drug warlord image. Yet, it remains highly dependent on drugs for income generation. Both Myanmar and Wa officials admit that local army units and businessmen continue the trade in close cooperation with criminal networks in neighbouring countries.

While the UWSA'S relations with the government, for the moment, seem among the most positive of any of the major ethnic groups, the intensely autonomous streak of the Wa, their significant military strength and the complex, often opportunistic, politics of the Golden Triangle suggest that the area could still become a major flash point in any future drive to pull the regions of Myanmar further together (ICG 7 May 2003 p. 8-9).

A 2004 report by the International Crisis Group describes the Chinese influence in the Wa and Kokang regions of Burma in even more sweeping terms:

The Wa and Kokang regions along the Chinese border are for most intents and purposes part of China rather than Myanmar. The common language is Chinese, and most trade and investment come from China, as do many teachers and doctors. They even use the Chinese currency and telecommunication system (ICG 9 Sep 2004 p. 8).

At the present time, however, tensions are mounting between the USWA and the Burmese military because of the drug trade, as predicted in the May 2003 ICG report above:

Rising tension between the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and Burmese government forces is reported by sources in Shan State and along the Sino-Burmese border. Saeng Juen, assistant editor of the Thailand-based Shan Herald Agency for News, said the Burmese army had deployed an estimated 2,000 reinforcements since the middle of January in Mong Ping, Mong Hsnu, Tang

Yan and Kunlong. The reinforcements included troops under Military Operation Command 16, he said.

The sound of weapons fire was reported from around Hopang and Panlong, regions close to the Sino-Burmese border where the tension between Burmese army and Wa troops is mounting. Border-based analyst Aung Kyaw Zaw said a Wa unit based in Hopang had tested its weapons two days ago. Aung Kyaw Zaw said that although the Burmese army was on the alert there was no military activity involving government forces or Wa troops at the moment. Saeng Juen said Burmese authorities had halted the construction of a bridge on the upper Salween River in Shan State after the UWSA prohibited further work.

Aung Kyaw Zaw said tension between the UWSA and Burmese forces had been increasing for several reasons, including a Wa announcement in January describing Wa-controlled areas as a special autonomous region known as the "Government of Wa State, Special Autonomous Region, Union of Myanmar." Tensions also reportedly rose after the Wa ignored a Burmese government demand for drug dealer Aik Hawk to be handed over. In a recent raid in Rangoon, a Burmese special drugs force arrested several associates of Aik Hawk, also known as Hsiao Haw, following the seizure of a quantity of heroin. Aik Hawk is the son-in-law of UWSA chairman Bao Youxiang. The Burmese government believes Aik Hawk is being protected by Wa forces in Panghsang, headquarters of the UWSA, which is heavily involved in the drugs trade.

Another cause of rising tension was an incident on January 19, when a 30-member Burmese delegation led by Lt-Gen Ye Myint, chief of Military Affairs Security, was forced to disarm during a visit to Wa-held territory in Shan State.

An estimated force of 20,000 UWSA soldiers is currently deployed along Burma's borders with Thailand and China, while an estimated 60,000 to 120,000 Wa villagers inhabit areas of lower Shan State (*The Irrawaddy Online* 10 Feb 09).

However, the tensions between the UWSA and the Burmese military and, more generally, regarding the drug trade and criminal activities do not represent generalized risk to Chinese living in Burma. Within the limits of this research, no information on targeting of Chinese in Burma was found. Information on the targeting of other ethnic minorities, in contrast, was widely available. Though the Human Rights Watch *World Report 2008* describes "continued violence against ethnic groups," it mentions no reports of violence targeting ethnic Chinese (HRW 31 Jan 2008). Neither do reports from Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group. As discussed above, however, the Chinese were included by the Department of State among non-indigenous ethnic groups who were denied full-citizenship rights by the government of Burma.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the COIRS within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

**Country of Origin
Information Research
Section**

Response to Information Request

Number: MMR09006.ZHN

Date: 25 June 2009

Myanmar: Information concerning Burmese Military Combat and Human Rights Violations from 1966 to 1995

From: Country of Origin Information Research Section (COIRS), USCIS, Washington, D.C.

Keywords: Burma / Myanmar / *Tatmadaw* / State Law and Order Restoration Council / SLORC

Query: Provide information concerning:
In which combat operations were units of the Burmese military engaged from 1966 to 1995?
Which rebel forces or other groups were fighting the Burmese military from 1966 to 1995?
Around 1995, in which combat operations was the HQS 33rd Infantry Division engaged?
Which human rights violations were committed from 1966 to 1995 by rebel forces and the Burmese military? Around 1995, were any human rights violations associated with the HQS 33rd Infantry Division?

Response:

Combat Operations

Searches of international and human rights and media sources including Nexis, the Open Source Center, and the internet, as well as Google Books produced no information concerning combat operations of the Burmese military from 1966 to 1995. (Reding, Andrew, June 2009).

Nor was information found concerning combat operations of the Burmese military from 1966 to 1995 by COIRS within the confines of this search. (COIRS, June 2009).

However, in regards to combat operations, Aung Zaw, (a Burmese journalist, student activist, and prisoner who was tortured for his democratic beliefs) wrote a commentary as the Editor of the Irrawaddy Newsletter which discusses the Burmese military, or *Tatmadaw*'s, 'Four Cuts' strategy. An excerpt of the article follows:

...Brig-Gen Than Tin, who led successful “four cuts” operations against communist insurgents in the Pegu Yoma mountains and ethnic insurgencies in the Irrawaddy delta in the late 1960s early 1970s, was a no-nonsense military officer determined to wipe out the insurgents.

In his autobiography, the general, now in his 80s, proudly claims that he defeated the multi-faceted insurgency and asks whether insurgents dare repeat their past mistakes.

...it was chilling to hear the general, handpicked by Gen Ne Win, issue a firm order to turn the insurgent-prone Pegu Yoma into a so-called “White Zone,” free of all insurgents. The Burmese army considered Pegu Yoma to be the enemy’s “brain” and the Irrawaddy delta its “stomach.”

In the next few years, Than Tin applied the “four cuts” strategy against villages and communist insurgents. Two hard-core leaders, Thakin Zin and Thakin Chit, were killed and the insurgency was over.

The “four cuts” strategy—involving forced resettlement of entire communities and confinement of villagers in special camps—had been learnt from the British by another author, Col Tun Tin, while studying in London. Tun Tin became prime minister in 1988.

Tun Tin, veteran of many military actions, including the “Battle of Insein,” set up a three-day war game plan attended by senior officers, including Ne Win. The plan demonstrated “four cuts operations” in practice—resettling villagers, cutting supplies, establishing intelligence, recruiting and raising funds.

It is clear from their writings that the veteran military leaders have little regret for their actions, claiming to have brought law, order and peace to Burma in the 1960s and 1970s...(Zaw 27 March 2009).

In regards to the ethnic or insurgent forces active between 1966 and 1995, *Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule* gave a list for the 1970s:

In the 1970s ... numerous ethnic armies seeking autonomy were continuing to battle against the regime during this period. The largest were the Karen National Union (KNU), the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Shan State Army (SSA), each with armies of several thousand members. Led by a mix of university-educated men and soldiers who had fought with the British.....Some of the armies operating in hills of northern Burma, include[ed] the CPB [Communist Party of Burma]... (Fink).

A 1992 Human Rights Watch (HRW) World Report also discussed the Burmese military’s maneuvers against ethnic minorities in the area:

In late 1990 and early 1991, SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] also heightened its offensive against ethnic minority insurgent groups, resulting in widespread civilian casualties and the displacement of tens of thousands of people along Burma’s borders. ...

In 1991, SLORC stepped up its military offenses against ethnic minority insurgent groups, particularly the two largest, the Karen National Union along the Thai

border and the Kachin Independence Organization, along the Chinese and Indian borders. SLORC strategy has included targeting civilian populations suspected of assisting insurgents. Large numbers of civilians in Kachin State are believed to have been moved to strategic villages under military control in early 1991. Several thousand others were reported to have fled their homes to areas along the Chinese border. (HRW 1992 p. 344, 347).

Just as in the 1970s, this was an additional application of the Four Cuts strategy.

A 1996 Amnesty International report provides additional, more recent information on the ongoing offensives by the military and ethnic groups against each other:

Although the cease-fire between the NMSP [New Mon State Party, the armed opposition group in Mon State] and the tatmadaw has not been broken, there are still some skirmishes between the Karen National Union (KNU, an armed group who have not yet agreed a ceasefire with the SLORC) and the tatmadaw in the Tanintharyi Division, where KNU troops are present. On 2 December 1995 there was fighting between the two groups near Loh Thaing, a Karen village in Yebyu township in the Tanintharyi Division. (AI 8 Aug 1996 p. 4-5).

By January 1996, it was reported that some ten thousand members of the Mong Tai Army (MTA), described as formerly the most powerful insurgent group in Shan State, had surrendered to government forces (Burmanet News 9 Feb 1996). That followed an internal split in the MTA that led one faction into talks with the SLORC. (Bangkok The Nation 3 Nov 1995).

Possible Acts of Violence

No information concerning human rights violations by specific units of the Burmese military could be found by COIRS within the time constraints of this research. (COIRS, June 2009)

However, more general information on the military from the period does indicate several acts of violence that can be connected with the military. For example, an Amnesty International report published in 1996 described several acts of violence by the military against ethnic minority and insurgent groups in 1995, and recapitulated past accounts of acts going back to 1987:

Amnesty International is concerned that the Burmese army has arbitrarily detained, extrajudicially killed, tortured and ill-treated members of ethnic minorities in the Shan and Mon States and the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Division in eastern Myanmar. This report is drawn from January and February 1996 interviews with dozens of members of the Shan, Akha, Lahu, Karen, and Mon ethnic minorities in Thailand. Most of these refugees are farmers and villagers who said they had fled from their homes because their lives were made impossible by the security forces.

The information contained in this report deals with events which took place in 1995:

Since Myanmar became independent from the United Kingdom in 1948, members of ethnic minority groups have engaged in insurgency activities against the central Burmese government in an effort to gain greater autonomy or complete independence. When the military reasserted power in September 1988 after suppressing the pro-democracy movement, they pursued offensives against ethnic minority armed opposition groups...

Since 1987 Amnesty International has documented the ill-treatment and killings of ethnic minorities who have been forced to act as porters carrying supplies for the tatmadaw. Amnesty International has also documented cases of killings and ill-treatment of members of ethnic minorities during military patrols of their villages, when soldiers have often accused villagers of having links with armed opposition groups.

[...] Many of those forced to act as porters have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment as punishment if they could not carry their loads of supplies and ammunition. Types of ill-treatment includes repeated beatings with bamboo sticks or rifle butts, and deprivation of food, water, rest, and medical treatment. (AI 8 Aug 1996 p. 1, 2).

The report offered further detail about the military's acts of violence in Shan State:

The following information about killings, ill-treatment and torture of civilians by the tatmadaw in the eastern Shan State relate to events which are reported to have taken place during 1995. [...] Those interviewed described how during 1995 the tatmadaw had forced them to act as unpaid porters when they had witnessed the killings of associates during forced portering. Porter duties took place in the context of armed conflict between the tatmadaw and the MTA [the Shan Muang Tai Army].

[...] An Akha village headman from Mong Hsat township said that in April 1995 700 tatmadaw troops came to his village after a battle with the MTA. He described what happened as follows:

“...the army came again. This time there were 100 soldiers. They beat four villagers... Three of them were beaten while working as conscripted porters; the other while [he] was in the village. One of them had his front teeth broken. Another man was hit three times in the head and once on the back with a stick..”

[...] A 38-year-old man, a member of the Lahu ethnic minority from another village in Tachilek township informed Amnesty International that he had left his home in April 1995 because he had been forced to porter frequently. The last time he was seized as a porter was early in 1995. He said that he had been seized as a porter from periods of two days up to two weeks, two or three times a month; the

length of time depended upon when he was able to escape from army custody. He described his treatment at the hands of the tatmadaw as follows:

“The most difficult part about portering is that the load is so heavy and the food so inadequate. This last time, we had to carry two mortars each, from morning to evening. We were just given parts of banana trees to eat by the army and because we were tied up we couldn’t find food for ourselves. Even if we can see water in front of us the SLORC won’t let us drink. They treat the porters like dogs and pigs.”

He was never beaten because he could manage to carry his load. However he reported that when he was taken in early 1995 he had witnessed the deaths of four porters. He said that he did not learn their names because they were members of the Shan ethnic minority from a different area. He described what he saw:

“All four were killed in the same way and for the same reason - they couldn’t walk and the load was too heavy. They were kicked in the buttocks and then hit on the head with a rifle butt. They were around the same age as me. When they were killed, no one said anything except one soldier who said, ‘You’re dead. You’re free now.’” [...]

Other female porters in the group were not so fortunate. According to the same witness, two girls died after their village headmen had paid for their release. While they were still detained the soldiers had reportedly raped them repeatedly. The names of the two girls are Mi Aul, age 15 and Mi She, age 16. A 61-year-old Akha village headman told Amnesty International what he believed had happened:

“The two girls had been relatives of my wife and their village was very close to ours, so I knew them well. I interviewed them after their release. When they returned their faces and skin were yellow. They said all the women had been separated from each other and the two of them had been raped continually for six nights, by two or three men each night, including the soldiers’ commander. They’d also had to carry on as porters. After their release, the two girls didn’t sleep, didn’t eat and eventually just died. Before they had been happy, healthy girls.” (AI 8 Aug 1996 p. 8, 9-10, 11).

A 1992 HRW report concurs with the more individual accounts from the AI report above, providing more general information about the military’s treatment of ethnic minorities made to be porters as of 1991:

The destruction of civilian property, rape, torture and summary execution of civilians during Burmese military offensives were widely reported in 1991, as in previous years. The Burmese military also forcibly conscripted ethnic minorities to carry military supplies during military campaigns. Many of these porters dies as a result of mistreatment, lack of adequate food and water, and use as “human

mine sweepers.” At least 100,000 people are thought to be internally displaced because of ongoing fighting in Karen and Kachin States alone. [...]

Also in 1991, approximately nine thousand Karen, four thousand Mon and one thousand Karenni fled to Thailand to escape military repression, bringing to nearly sixty thousand the number of refugees living in camps along the Thai border. To date, an estimated fifty thousand refugees from Burma’s Kachin territory have fled to Tibet and four thousand to India. (HRW 1992 p. 347-348).

The “human mine sweepers” strategy by the military is explained by Christina Fink in the book *Living Silence*:

[T]he Tatmadaw soldiers try to defend themselves by laying mines around their sleeping areas and using villagers as sentries at night. During the day, villagers are forced to act as human mine-sweepers, because the ill-equipped ethnic armies rely on landmines to defend their territory. (Fink 2001).

According to the Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2207:

“On 7 July 2007, four villagers from Blut Doh village were stopped by a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #378 and LIB #388 who demanded to be shown the way to Wah Do Ko village in Nyaunglebin District. Three of the villagers refused the order and were summarily executed by the soldiers. The sole surviving villager accompanied the soldiers as a guide and was ordered to walk ahead of the column as a human minesweeper. Five days later, one of the soldiers was killed by a landmine, and in the confusion created by the blast the villager was able to escape. (For more information, see [Chapter 4: Landmines](#)). The names of the three villagers who were killed were: Saw Htoo Htoo; Saw Mya Doh Moo; and Saw Po Eh Do.”(Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2007)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to COIRS within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

**Country of Origin
Information Research
Section**

Response to Information Request

Number: MMR09007.NYC

Date: 30 October 2009

Subject: Information on Singapore's Policies on Re-entry Permits and on the Requirements (for Burmese Citizens) to Maintain Permanent Resident Status in Singapore

From: Country of Origin Information Research Service, USCIS, Washington, D.C.

Keywords: Singapore / permanent resident / re-entry permit

Query: • Information on the five-year Singapore Re-entry Permit. Specifically, would a holder be required to renew this document to maintain permanent resident status, even if he does not intend to travel?

Response:

No. According to Lim Jing Jing, Deputy Head of Public & Internal Communications for the Singapore Commissioner of Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA):

While there is no expiry date for the Singapore permanent resident (PR) status, there is a validity period for the re-entry permit (REP) issued to Singapore PRs.

The REP allows one to retain the PR status while travelling abroad provided that he returns to Singapore before his REP expires (*Straits Times* 11 Feb 2008).

In August 2008, the Tokyo-based *Kyodo World Service* said that Singapore authorities were discriminating against Burmese citizens who participated in protests against repressive actions of their government. It said that the government was delaying or rejecting applications for renewal of re-entry permits, but pointed out that those who were denied renewal could continue to live in Singapore as long as they did not leave the country:

Myanmar nationals in Singapore who had been active in protests against their country's military government are facing difficulty in getting their visas renewed to stay on in the city-state, a Myanmar student acting as their spokesman said Friday.

Three Myanmar nationals have left Singapore in recent weeks after their applications were rejected, including one who had just graduated from a local university and found a job here, said Myo Myint Maung, a 23-year-old business student at a local university.

Another three, who have stayed in Singapore for several years after receiving permanent resident status, have been waiting for about a week for the authorities to approve their applications to renew their reentry permits to enable them to return here whenever they travel abroad.

Usually, it takes about 30 minutes or a day at most to get a reentry permit, he said.

If their applications for reentry permits are rejected, they can still live in Singapore but the moment they go abroad, they might not be allowed to reenter Singapore, he explained.

All six, including engineers and an accountant, had taken part in past protests against the Myanmar junta in the city-state, which has strict rules barring street demonstrations (*Kyodo World Service* 8 Aug 2008).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the COIRS within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

**Country of Origin
Information Research
Section**

Response to Information Request

Number: MMR10002.ZAR

Date: 15 July 2010

Subject: Myanmar: Information Concerning Pa-O National Organization

From: Country of Origin Information Research Service, USCIS, Washington, D.C.

Keywords: Myanmar / Burma / Shan / Pa-O National Organization / PNO / Pa-O National Army / PNA / Pa-O / Taungthu / PNLO

Query:

- (1) In what activities was the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) engaged in Shan State between September 1988 and February 1989?
- (2) What allegations have there been, if any, that this organization engaged in human rights abuses?
- (3) What allegations have there been, if any, that this organization has used or espoused violence?

Response:

In September 1988, the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) joined the Democratic Alliance of Burma, an umbrella organization of armed groups that included the All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF). Within the constraints of this research, specific information about its activities during the specified period was not found. What general information is available is presented below. In 1990, the PNO took a very small number of seats in the parliamentary elections that were overwhelmingly won by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. By 1990 the PNO was believed to have come to an understanding with the Burmese military government in Shan State. This cooperation was cemented and formalized in the years that followed.

The Pa-O, also known as Taungthu in Burmese,¹ is a Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group that is widely distributed in eastern Myanmar. It is the second largest ethnic group in Shan State. There are over one million Pa-O living in Shan, Karen, Mon, and Kayah States. Most are

¹ David Bradley, HILL TRIBES PHRASEBOOK, 151 (Lonely Planet 1999), from Google Books.

Buddhist.² As of 2002, the Pa-O population in Burma and the adjoining region of Thailand was estimated at 1.43 million.³ According to the *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations*:

The Pa-O are a tribal people who have retained their traditional tribal and caste structures and their ancient culture in the isolation of the heavily forested mountains around the upper Salween River. The tribes collectively called Pa-O have only united in recent decades and still display great differences in culture, dialect, and political organization. They are also known as Taungthu, which can be translated as “southerner” or “mountaineer.” ...

The British took control of Upper Burma from the Burmese kingdom in 1886. The European authorities established a tradition of indirect rule, signing treaties with various Pa-O tribes living in the regions nominally ruled by the Shan principalities. ...

During World War II, the Pa-O formed guerrilla bands behind the Japanese lines. Trained and armed by Allied officers parachuted into the region, the fierce Pa-O guerrilla bands terrorized the Japanese patrols and served as guides for Allied forces crossing their rugged terrain. The guerrillas, after the end of the war, formed the nucleus of a Pa-O national army and the growing nationalist movement.⁴



The Pa-O resisted the central government when Burma became independent in 1948. The first armed resistance group was the *Pa-O Lam Bhu* (Pa-O Union). The Pa-O National Organization/Army (PNO/PNA) was formed in 1976, becoming a member of the National Democratic Front. In 1988 it became a member of the Democratic Alliance of Burma, an umbrella organization for armed opposition groups including, at that time, the All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF).⁵ In September 1988, the Australian newspaper *Sydney Morning Herald* described the PNO as “obscure” as opposed to “well-known.”⁶ In the June 1990 elections for 485 parliamentary seats, the PNO won 3 seats, while the opposition National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won 392 seats.⁷ In 2001, the International Crisis Group described the PNO as one of

² Ko Htwe, *Pa-O Seeks Party Registration*, THE IRRAWADDY, 5 Apr 2010, http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18200 (accessed 17 Jun 2010); Donald M. Seekins, HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF BURMA (MYANMAR), 353 (Scarecrow Press 2006), from Google Books.

³ James Minahan, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE STATELESS NATIONS: S-Z, 1481 (Greenwood 2002), from Google Books.

⁴ James Minahan, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE STATELESS NATIONS: S-Z, 1481-2 (Greenwood 2002), from Google Books.

⁵ Donald M. Seekins, HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF BURMA (MYANMAR), 353 (Scarecrow Press 2006), from Google Books; Hseng Khio Fah, *Surrender groups to be transformed as police force*, SHAN HERALD AGENCY, in English, 29 May 2009, from Open Source Center, SEP20090529095007.

⁶ Peter Hastings, *Change, for Burma, may be as far off as ever*, SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 12 Sep 1988, 14, from Nexis.

⁷ Burma Broadcasting System, 16 June 1990, from BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, *Latest election results*, 21 Jun 1990, from Nexis; Human Rights Watch, VOTE TO NOWHERE: THE MAY 2008 CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM IN BURMA, 14, May 2008,

several groups with “small constituencies and minimal influence.”⁸ [See the Human Rights Watch ‘*background information*’ below for additional context.]

The PNO is led by Aung Kham Hti, a former Buddhist monk from the Shan State capital of Taunggyi.⁹ A competing organization, Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organization (SSNLO), also known informally as the “Red Pa-O,” is led by Tha Kalei.¹⁰ As of 1990, the PNA reportedly had 600-700 armed men in the hills southeast of Taunggyi, and the SSNLO had 800-900 armed men in the same region.¹¹ In 1991, UPI reported that “The PNA probably has no more than 500 armed soldiers, but it was strategically placed in the mountains near the major town of Taunggyi, capital of the Shan State.”¹²

In 1990, Bertil Lintner, a Swedish journalist based in Thailand,¹³ reported:

There has been little fighting between the PNA and government forces and the two appear to have some kind of understanding, possibly to counter the influence of the CPB [Communist Party of Burma]-affiliated, “Red Pa-O” organization, the SSNLO.¹⁴

Within a year, the PNO/PNA had struck a deal with the military regime, a deal that has been politically beneficial and economically lucrative for both sides. The Myanmar military junta (State Law and Order Restoration Council, SLORC) removed the ban on the PNO on 18 Feb 1991.¹⁵ Then on 11 April 1991, the SLORC signed a cease-fire

<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/04/30/vote-nowhere-0> (accessed 19 Jun 2010); Michael F. Martin, *Burma's 2010 Elections: Implications of the New Constitution and Election Laws*, Congressional Research Service, 29 Apr 2010, 11, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/142362.pdf> (accessed 21 Jun 2010).

⁸ International Crisis Group, MYANMAR: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY, 13, Asia Report N° 27, 6 Dec 2001, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/myanmar%20the%20role%20of%20civil%20society.ashx> (accessed 19 Jun 2010).

⁹ Bertil Lintner, THE RISE AND FALL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BURMA (CPB), 106 (SEAP Publications 1990), from Google Books; Ko Htwe, *Leading Parties Stay Away from Election*, THE IRRIWADDY, 19 Apr 2010, http://www.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=18273&Submit=Submit (accessed 21 Jun 2010).

¹⁰ *Burmese junta declares Shan State free of ethnic insurgency*, AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 9 Oct 1994, from Nexis.

¹¹ Robert I. Rotberg, BURMA: PROSPECTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE, 171 (World Peace Foundation 1998), from Google Books; Bertil Lintner, THE RISE AND FALL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BURMA (CPB), 106 (SEAP Publications 1990), from Google Books.

¹² *Burmese military reaches agreement with insurgent group*, UPI, 13 Apr 1991, from Nexis.

¹³ Bertil Lintner, *Reaching Out to Burma*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, 3 Nov 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703740004574512231868995674.html> (accessed 20 Jun 2010).

¹⁴ Bertil Lintner, THE RISE AND FALL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BURMA (CPB), 106 (SEAP Publications 1990), from Google Books.

¹⁵ Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs, *Removal from List of Unlawful Associations*, VOICE OF MYANMAR, Rangoon home service 1330 GMT 14 May 1991, from BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, *SLORC legalizes former insurgent groups*, 16 May 1991, from Nexis.

agreement with the PNO/PNA, authorizing it to maintain control of Special Region 6 in southern Shan State.¹⁶ The SLORC signed a similar cease-fire agreement with the SNNLO on 9 October 1994.¹⁷

PNO forces have since been deployed as government surrogates. The military government boasts that they have been used to combat the growing of opium poppies in that region.¹⁸ Reporting on developments in 2006, Human Rights Watch reached a different conclusion, suggesting that they profit from the drugs that are seized, and act as surrogates to combat ethnic rebel groups that have not struck deals with the government:

A faction of the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) surrendered to the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] in June, but soon broke the agreement and many of its members returned to the SSA-S. The SPDC has pressured ethnic ceasefire militias, including the Wa and Pa-O armies, into attacking the SSA-S. The SPDC uses other ethnic militias as auxiliary forces to suppress the rural population. Many of these militias are thought to be financing themselves through trade in illegal drugs.¹⁹

In 2009, the government instructed the ethnic armed groups with which it has signed cease-fire agreements to reorganize as Border Guard Forces. According to Amnesty International:

In April 2009, the government announced that groups governed by ceasefires would be required to transform themselves into *tatmadaw* [Myanmar armed forces]-commanded Border Guard Forces (BGF) by the end of June. The deadline was then extended to the end of October, again to the end of December 2009, and yet again indefinitely into 2010. While not expressly linked to the 2010 elections, the BGF plan is authorized under the 2008 constitution. Nine groups have agreed, six of which from the largest ethnic minorities: the Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group (Kachin); the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K); the Kachin Defence Army; Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF); the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA); and the Karen Peace Front (KPF). Six groups have refused, four of which from the largest ethnic minorities: the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) (Shan); the Shan

¹⁶ Donald M. Seekins, HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF BURMA (MYANMAR), 353 (Scarecrow Press 2006), from Google Books; Ko Htwe, *Pa-O Seeks Party Registration*, THE IRRAWADDY, 5 Apr 2010, http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18200 (accessed 17 Jun 2010).

¹⁷ *Burmese junta declares Shan State free of ethnic insurgency*, AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 9 Oct 1994, from Nexis.

¹⁸ Editorial, *Towards Total Annihilation of Drug Menace*, THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR, 15 Jan 2000, from Open Source Center, FTS20000119000046; TV Myanmar, Rangoon, in *Burmese 1330 GMT 9 Dec 2002*, from BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, *Burma's Khin Nyunt attends ceremony to destroy seized drugs in Shan State*, 16 Dec 2002, from Nexis.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Burma: Events of 2006*, WORLD REPORT 2007, <http://www.hrw.org/englishwr2k7/docs/2007/01/11/burma14865.htm> (accessed 18 Jun 2010).

State Army-North (SSA-N); the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA); and the Mon National Liberation Front (MNLF).²⁰

In October 2009, the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation reported that the PNO was one of the first two groups to accept the government's demands:

So far the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO) and the Kayinni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) have accepted the Government's demands. They will transform their armed units into Border Guard Forces and form political parties. The Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the New Democratic Army Kachin (NDAK) have accepted, but with some conditions that still have to be worked out. For now they insist on not forming political parties but supporting the 2010 national elections.

In addition, negotiations between the United Wa State Army (USWA) and the North-Eastern Regional Command and the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) and the Northern Regional Command on a proposed Border Guard Force are under way.²¹

The deal struck between the PNO and the governing junta has also reportedly resulted in the PNO sharing mineral riches with the Burmese generals. PNO leader Aung Kham Hti co-chairs the junta-organized Union Solidarity and Development Association (UNDA) Shan State South branch.²² That affords him economic as well as political benefits. According to *Irrawaddy*, an independent magazine covering Burmese news from Thailand:

Ne Win Tun, the CEO of Ruby Dragon Jade and Gems Co Ltd, is the right-hand man of Aung Kham Hti, the leader of the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) from southern Shan State. After reaching a peace agreement with the regime in 1991, the PNO set up Jade Dragon (Gems) Co Ltd, the parent company of Ruby Dragon Jade and Gems Co Ltd, and appointed Ne Win Tun to run the business.

Ne Win Tun operates gold and gem mines in Mong Hsu in Shan State, Pha Khant and Tawmaw in Kachin State, Kawlin and Khamti in Sagaing Division and Mogok in Mandalay Division. ...

It is widely believed that high-ranking Burmese generals are shareholders in Ruby Dragon Jade and Gems Co Ltd, the largest company of its kind in Burma. In the early 2000s, the company donated a massive 3,000-tonne slab of jade to the junta.

²⁰ Amnesty International, THE REPRESSION OF ETHNIC MINORITY ACTIVISTS IN MYANMAR, 17, Feb 2010, ASA 16/001/2010, <http://z02rscow12:8080/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-80377/asa160012010en.pdf> (accessed 09 Jul 2010).

²¹ Timo Kivimäki and Paul Pasch, *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Multiethnic Union of Myanmar*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Oct 2009, 9, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/07155.pdf> (accessed 21 Jun 2010).

²² Hseng Khio Fah, *Autonomy granted not genuine: Pa-O youth*, BURMA NEWS INTERNATIONAL, 26 Sep 2008, <http://www.bnionline.net/news/shan/5032-autonomy-granted-not-genuine-pa-o-youth.html> (accessed 17 Jun 2010).

Ne Win Tun is regarded as one of the 10 richest people in Burma. Observers say that it is unlikely that the US Block Burmese Jade Act of 2008 will have much impact on his gem-trading business, since most of his customers are from China.²³

The PNO has regularly issued public statements supportive of the positions of the military dictatorship:

- On 27 September 1998, PNO Chair Aung Kham Hti denounced the National League for Democracy, the party headed by opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi that won a landslide victory in national elections held in 1990, a victory crushed by the military junta.²⁴
- On 20 April 2005, PNO Chair Aung Kham Hti denounced separatist efforts in Shan State, stating: “The PNO hereby declares that in view of ensuring the non-disintegration of the Union, it totally disapproves and opposes the formation of the Liberated Shan State Government that is leading the destructive acts of saboteurs from inside and outside the country, who are jealous of the successes the Union of Myanmar has been achieving in her march towards the discipline-flourishing multi-party democracy.”²⁵
- In an official press release on 13 November 2007, the PNO stated that opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi does not speak on its behalf.²⁶

The Free Burma Coalition describes PNO Chair Chair Aung Kham Hti as a “permanent collaborator with the junta.”²⁷ *Le Monde Diplomatique* has reported speculation that Aung Kham Hti, which it describes as the most charismatic Pa-O leader, may be named a vice-president of Myanmar after the upcoming election.²⁸

²³ Aung Zaw, *Tracking the Tycoons*, THE IRRAWADDY, Sep 2008, from Open Source Center, SEP20080907005011; for more on the jade donation, see Naw Seng, *Pa-O Donate Gigantic Piece of Jade*, THE IRRAWADDY, 30 May 2002, http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=3018 (accessed 17 Jun 2010).

²⁴ Open Source Center, *Pa-O Group Denounces NLD, Supports Rangoon*, 1 Oct 1998, FTS19981001000170; CIA, *Burma*, WORLD FACTBOOK, last updated 27 May 2010.

²⁵ Myanmar News Agency, *Aims and Acts of the Renegade Sao Hkam Hpa and Cohorts Endangering Interest of Union of Myanmar And The Entire People; Social Organizations, Peace Groups Condemn, Oppose the Announcement of Renegade Group*, THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR, 21 Apr 2005, from Open Source Center, SEP20050421000038.

²⁶ Myanmar News Agency, *PNO rejects Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's statement implying that she will represent national races*, 14 Nov 2007, from Open Source Center, SEP20071114035003.

²⁷ Free Burma Coalition, *Enemies of Burmese Revolution*, 19 Jun 2006, <http://www.freeburmacoalition.org/Enemies%20of%20Burmese%20Revolution%5B1%5D.doc.pdf> (accessed 21 Jun 2010).

²⁸ André and Louis Boucaud, *En Birmanie, des élections au bout des fusils (In Burma, elections at gunpoint)*, LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE, Nov 2009, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2009/11/BOUCAUD/18371> (accessed 21 Jun 2010).

On 2 April 2010, the Pa-O National Organization registered as a political party with the Myanmar Election Commission.²⁹ It thus signaled its intent to take part in forthcoming elections that have been widely criticized.³⁰ The National League for Democracy is boycotting the election, as are all other major parties except the National Unity Party, the renamed Burma Socialist Programme Party, led by late dictator Gen Ne Win.³¹

Amnesty International's detailed 58-page report on "The repression of ethnic minority activists in Myanmar," published in February 2010, makes no mention of any repression directed at the PNO. The only Pa-O related human rights violation that it documents is a single case of *tatmadaw* violence against an alleged supporter of a competing armed group with a similar name, the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO).³² The PNLO split off from the SSNLO in 2007.³³ It has since had deadly armed confrontations with the government armed forces.³⁴

Background information from Human Rights Watch provides context for understanding the role the PNO has played in its relationship with the military government and its democratic opposition:

Social tensions produced by 26 years of repressive military rule and socialist economic mismanagement came to the surface in March 1988 by way of student protests. ...

On August 8, 1988 (commemorated in Burma as 8-8-88), a major nationwide protest took place, with hundreds of thousands of people (some estimate up to one million) marching in Rangoon calling for democracy, elections, and economic reforms. ...

²⁹ Ko Htwe, *Pa-O Seeks Party Registration*, THE IRRAWADDY, 5 Apr 2010, http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18200 (accessed 17 Jun 2010); Phanida, *Three ethnic parties register with Election Commission*, MIZZIMA, 7 Apr 2010, <http://www.mizzima.com/news/election-2010/3795-three-ethnic-parties-register-with-election-commission.html> (accessed 17 Jun 2010).

³⁰ Michael F. Martin, *Burma's 2010 Elections: Implications of the New Constitution and Election Laws*, Congressional Research Service, 29 Apr 2010, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/142362.pdf> (accessed 21 Jun 2010); Human Rights Watch, *VOTE TO NOWHERE: THE MAY 2008 CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM IN BURMA*, May 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/04/30/vote-nowhere-0> (accessed 19 Jun 2010).

³¹ Ko Htwe, *Leading Parties Stay Away from Election*, THE IRRAWADDY, 19 Apr 2010, http://www.irrawaddymedia.com/article.php?art_id=18273&Submit=Submit (accessed 21 Jun 2010).

³² Amnesty International, *THE REPRESSION OF ETHNIC MINORITY ACTIVISTS IN MYANMAR*, 41, Feb 2010, ASA 16/001/2010, <http://z02rscow12:8080/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-80377/asa160012010en.pdf> (accessed 09 Jul 2010).

³³ Saw Yan Naing, *Burmese Soldiers Torture Civilians in Shan State*, THE IRRAWADDY, 22 May 2009, <http://www.myanmathadin.com/news/human-rights/404-burmese-soldiers-torture-civilians-in-shan-state.html> (accessed 21 Jun 2010).

³⁴ Democratic Voice of Burma website, Oslo, in Burmese 1430 GMT 17 Oct 2008, from BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, *Oslo-based website reports two dead in Pa-O raid on Burmese army camp*, 19 Oct 2008, from Nexis.

To gain internal legitimacy and foreign support for its rule, the SLORC changed the English name of the country to “Myanmar” and rapidly instituted a series of reforms, including promulgating an electoral law that permitted political parties to form and organize. The National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi and retired generals U Tin Oo and U Aung Shwe, became the most popular and well-organized political party throughout the country. ...

Despite the repression faced by opposition parties during the campaign period, in the May 1990 elections the NLD won an overwhelming victory. A total of 13 million valid votes were cast out of nearly 21 million eligible voters. The NLD won over 80 percent of the seats (392 out of 485 parliamentary seats) and 60 percent of the popular vote. The second largest opposition party, the ethnic-based Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), won 23 seats. The SLORC-backed National Unity Party won just 10 seats and just over 2 percent of the vote.

The SLORC was taken by surprise by the magnitude of its defeat and the repudiation of military rule. ...

The SLORC overturned the results of the 1990 national election by declaring that the elected MPs were elected not to sit in parliament, but only to “draw up the constitution of a future democratic State.” The generals reneged on this promise as well. ...

In January 1993 the National Convention was finally convened with 702 delegates, of whom only 106 were elected representatives from the 1990 elections. All the other 596 delegates were handpicked by the SLORC to “represent” workers, peasants, intellectuals, national races, and the army, or were “specially invited persons.”

From its inception, SLORC (and its successor, the SPDC) designed and controlled the National Convention to ensure its outcome would reflect the objectives of the military junta. The delegates were only allowed to draw up the “basic principles” of the draft constitution, not the constitution itself. Moreover, the “principles” of the constitution had to conform with the “objectives” of the National Convention as already drawn up by the SLORC, which included “the participation of the *Tatmadaw* [armed forces] in the national political leadership role of the State in the future.” ...

In November 1995 the elected NLD delegates walked out of the National Convention, announcing a boycott of the process. ... In response, the Convening Commission expelled the 86 NLD delegates from the National Convention, on the basis that the NLD delegates had violated the SLORC-drafted convention rules by failing to ask permission for their two-day absence from the National Convention. ...

Soon after the NLD expulsion, the SLORC adjourned the National Convention in March 1996; it would not be reconvened until 2003. ...

The reconvened National Convention was even less representative than the original one. Because of the expulsion of the NLD delegates, the number of remaining elected delegates stood at just 15 out of 1,088 delegates. The SPDC made up for the decrease in elected delegates by vastly increasing the number of delegates from “National Races”-many representing the ethnic minority groups who had signed ceasefire agreements with the SPDC-from 215 in 1993 to 633 in 2004. ... Any proposal at odds with the SPDC’s own vision for its draft constitution was dismissed or ignored. In June 2004 the SPDC summarily rejected a proposal submitted by 13 of the ceasefire groups to establish a decentralized federal union of Burma with “ethnic or national democracy.” ... the SPDC announced on February 19, 2008, that it would hold a referendum on the

draft constitution sometime in May 2008, to be followed by parliamentary elections in 2010.³⁵

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the COIRS within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, VOTE TO NOWHERE: THE MAY 2008 CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM IN BURMA, 12-22, May 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/04/30/vote-nowhere-0> (accessed 19 Jun 2010).

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Myanmar

Response to Information Request Number:	MMR99001.ZNY
Date:	1 February 1999
Subject:	Burma/Myanmar. Information On 1) Whether The Government Maintains Lists Of Political Dissidents, 2) Existing Exit Control Procedures Of The Burmese Government, And 3) The Ability Of A Government Opponent To Obtain An Exit Permit.
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Burma / Myanmar / Political Opposition / Dissidents / Freedom Of Political Opinion / Right To A Passport / Travel Documents / Freedom Of Movement

Query:

1. Does the government maintain lists of dissidents?
2. What exit control procedures exist to leave Burma?
3. Would the government grant an exit permit to a political dissident?

Response:

An employee of The National Coalition of the Government of the Union of Burma in Washington, D.C. stated in a telephone conversation that lists are maintained by the Burmese government of party members who are held in custody and people arrested, and that these lists are confidential (Telecon, The National Coalition of the Government of the Union of Burma, 20 Oct. 1998). A US Department of State employee on the Burma Desk provided similar information, emphasizing that the lists are not publicly available, and that there is no public information about the lists (Telecon, US Department of State, 20 Oct. 1998).

An employee of the Free Burma Coalition added that the lists are completed by four Intelligence Branches, coordinated by a National Intelligence Bureau (Telecon, Free Burma Coalition, 20 Oct. 1998). A former employee of the US Embassy in Rangoon agreed with the involvement of intelligence agencies and added that police and military officers assist in surveillance of internal dissidents and dissidents living abroad. The former employee said that lists are prepared by the Directorate of Defense Service Intelligence (DDSI) (Email exchange, US Embassy, Rangoon, 21 Oct. 1998).

Evidence that the government of Burma maintains surveillance over dissidents and maintenance of lists can be openly found in the government's treatment of prominent dissident Aung San Suu Kyi. Since the release from house arrest in July 1995 of Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of The National League for Democracy (The Toronto Star, 5 Mar. 1997), the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has maintained detailed lists of her excursions. The lists note her activities of visiting her mother's grave with her son, and her attendance at a friend's birthday party (AsiaWeek, 21 Nov. 1997).

In regard to exit control procedures and the ability of government opponents to obtain exit permission, the employee of The Free Burma Coalition stated that when any Burmese applies for a passport, he or she must fill out a 40-page application form. He stated that "the form needs to be endorsed by a government officer (Captain or above). If the applicant is a civil servant, it must be endorsed by a Department head and forwarded to the Township police and political intelligence. The application is then forwarded to the branches of the National Intelligence Bureau. Once reviewed, the application is sent to a Cabinet meeting, where it is approved or disapproved by the Ministry of Interior, Defense, or Foreign Affairs, or the Prime Minister." The Free Burma Coalition employee noted that the government officials "comb a person's background." The Free Burma Coalition employee stated that "not many dissidents have passports or exit permits. Most remain in jail or in disguise... A small number, who speak English, leave to go to college or graduate school overseas." However, the employee stated that "the government is willing to let dissidents out, particularly student activists, with the understanding that the more dissidents who leave, the better it is for them [the Burmese government], as long as the dissidents give up their activities" (Telecon, Free Burma Coalition, 20 Oct. 1998).

Other experts consulted believe that it is difficult for political opponents to obtain exit permission. The former employee of the US Embassy in Rangoon stated that people with no record of opposition have had difficulty getting passports to travel, and that usually bribery of officials is necessary (Email exchange, US Embassy, Rangoon, 21 Oct. 1998). Michael Christopher commented on difficulties non-dissidents encounter at the Burmese border in his 1997 article entitled "Reflections on a Visit to Burma." In this article, Christopher agrees with the Burmese immigration and customs experiences of Danish writer, Mogens Osterhammel, when Christopher states that passport control in Burma is "protracted and painful.... Painful, in the sense of having to bribe officials and porters with cigarettes and money in order to ensure that the ordeal is not as protracted as it could be" (Asian Survey, 1 June 1997).

The employee of The National Coalition of the Government of the Union of Burma in Washington, D.C. stated that most dissidents who leave Burma to escape persecution do so without travel documents, fleeing to Thailand, thus the government does not issue travel documents to dissidents (Telecon, The National Coalition of the Government of the Union of Burma, 20 Oct. 1998). The employee on the Burma Desk said, "A rare dissident has a passport, and an exit permit is less likely than a passport" (Telecon, US Department of State, 20 Oct. 1998). According to an Amnesty International employee, dissidents usually don't go through immigration channels. "Ninety percent of them go to Thailand, and then leave from Thailand; if they are dissidents, they definitely don't go to the airport" (Telecon, Amnesty International, 27 Oct. 1998).

The former employee at the US Embassy of Rangoon stated, "Many opponents have escaped Burma via routes through the jungle or ethnic controlled areas to Thailand or India. Passports are sometimes purchased in Thailand from members of the Burmese Embassy. Corruption in Burma is systemic." (Email exchange, US Embassy, Rangoon, 21 Oct. 1998)

In 1997, Thai police arrested 20 reputed Burmese dissidents, and charged them with illegal entry into Thailand. Burmese student exiles alleged that the Burmese military junta has requested that Thai military officials arrest any Burmese dissidents who illegally cross the border, an allegation that the Thai military has denied. (AFP, 27 Nov. 1997).

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Myanmar

Response to Information Request Number:	MYN98001.zny
Date:	September 17, 1998
Subject:	Myanmar: State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)/ State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)/ National League for Democracy (NLD)/Burmese Dissidents
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	SLORC/SPDC/NLD/Lists/Passports/PoliticalOpposition/Dissident/Prisons/Torture

Query:

In Burma, now Myanmar, are there lists of people to be arrested by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), now the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)? Also, if a high profile dissident was on the list of people to be arrested by SPDC, is it likely that the dissident would exit Myanmar with a passport validated and stamped by the SPDC?

Response:

State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), currently named State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

SLORC's establishment on September 18, 1988, after Burmese protests and pro-democracy demonstrations in Rangoon was announced by General Saw Maung, Commander-in-Chief. SLORC's mission was to eliminate all forms of internal dissent or rebellion. On September 19, 1988, the SLORC ordered massacres and a coup d'etat of power. One of the first goals, after the establishment of power, was to expand the Tatmadaw or the SLORC officers to 321,000, almost double the 1988 size. Another goal was to procure arms and increase intelligence capabilities.

On November 15, 1997, the SLORC announced a reorganization to SPDC. Currently, the SPDC is smaller than the SLORC with younger officers and Cabinet members. The more corrupt SLORC members and the Cabinet retired. The Tatmadaw is now the permanent military government. (Jane's Intelligence Review 1 March 1998)

The National League for Democracy (NLD)

In 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of NLD, the opposition to SPDC, and Nobel Peace prize winner led pro-democracy demonstrations that resulted in up to 10,000 people murdered, and the imprisonment, torture and forced exile to Thailand of others. Confident of a victory after the killings, SLORC soldiers decided to hold a May 1990 election, in which the NLD won a landslide victory with 80% of the seats contested. SLORC, refusing to

acknowledge the NLD victory, arrested thousands of NLD workers and imprisoned those attempting to form a government. SLORC refused to form a new government until a new Constitution was drafted. A national Constitution drafting convention is still being organized and gains public support because the SPDC bribes people to attend, and fines them for absences. (Asian Survey 1 June 1997) According to Suu Kyi, human rights violations have worsened under the SPDC. She is quoted as saying, "There is no justice in Burma today. There is no rule of law. Anybody can be arrested at any time on any pretext and be given the maximum sentence possible and nobody would be in a position to protest." (Japan Economic Newswire 2 April 1998)

Treatment of SPDC Dissidents

SPDC-run jails, notably Insein, are well known for brutal treatment of inmates, especially NLD members. (Inter Press Service 13 November 1996). Political prisoners or "troublemakers" are often sent to Thayawaddy and Myin Chan prisons, which are equally appalling. (Inter Press Service 29 August 1997)

According to Simrin Singh in an article entitled, "Burma-Human Rights: Insein Prison, A Political Prisoner's Nightmare," "Insein...is a black hole where political dissidents are thrown in after sham trials, often subjected to third degree torture and even killed or allowed to die for want of basic medical care." (Inter Press Service 13 November 1996)

U Kyi Maung, Deputy Chairman of the NLD, was arrested in October 1996 and taken directly to Insein. Under international pressure, he was released in a week. (Inter Press Service 13 November 1996)

Leo Nichols, Honorable Consul for Scandinavian Countries in Burma, died in Insein prison in 1996. (Inter Press Service 13 November 1996)

Saw Win, an elected member of Parliament and NLD member, died August 7, 1998, of unknown causes in Thayawaddy prison. (Japan Economic Newswire 15 August 1998)

U Hla Than, an elected member of Parliament suffered from AIDS and died in Insein prison in 1996. (Inter Press Service 6 August 1997)

U Tin Shwe, a human rights lawyer and writer, died of heart disease on June 8, 1997 in a Rangoon hospital. Supporters note that inadequate medical attention while he was in Insein prison is the reason for his death. (Inter Press Service 6 August 1997)

The following 8 prisoners of conscience were highlighted in 1998 by Amnesty International to mark the 10th anniversary of Burmese military repression (M2 Presswire 13 August 1998):

U Ohn Myint was rearrested in February 1998 for helping to produce a history of the student movement.

U Win Tin's sentence was increased, while in prison, for allegedly attempting to smuggle a letter about poor prison conditions out of Insein prison to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar.

Daw San San, a NLD Parliamentarian, was arrested for the discussion of actions if the SPDC refused to cede power to the NLD, and organization of a party meeting.

Dr. Zaw Min, a medical doctor, was arrested.

Daw San San New, a writer, was arrested.

Moe Kalayar Oo, a philosophy student, was arrested.

U Win Htein, a senior NLD official, was arrested.

Maung San Hlaing, a bodyguard of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, was arrested.

In addition, pro-democracy activists, such as Ye Teiza and 12 other imprisoned students had political tattoos removed by crude, painful procedures with the possibility of contracting AIDS. (The Boston Globe 11 January 1998)

According to the 1997 Amnesty International Report, "more than 1,000 political prisoners arrested in previous years, including 68 prisoners of conscience and hundreds of possible prisoners of conscience, remained in detention. Almost 2,000 people were arrested for political reasons during [1997], among them at least 23 prisoners of conscience. Although most were released, at least 175 were still detained without charge or trial at the end of [1997]. No political prisoners arrested in previous years were released." (RefWorld Amnesty International Report 1997)

Burmese Government Lists

In 1996, in order to hinder attendance at a 3 day NLD rally, the Burmese government detained 195 opposition activists, and in an editorial concerning the detainees in the New Light of Myanmar newspaper stated, "You will be home when the time comes. If you are reasonable you will be back home. If you are stubborn, you will not." (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 24 May 1996)

Since Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in July 1995 (The Toronto Star 5 March 1997), the SPDC has detailed lists of the excursions of Ms. Suu Kyi, known to them as Mrs. Aris, since her husband's name is Briton Michael Aris. The list notes her activities of visiting her mother's grave with her son and attending a friend's birthday party. (Asia Week 21 November 1997)

NLD Lists

Lists of NLD detained members are developed by the NLD and submitted to the SPDC, with a request for release. (Japan Economic Newswire 21 August 1995)

Passports and Illegal Entry

According to Danish writer, Mogens Osterhammel, in a 1997 article entitled, "Reflections On a Visit to Burma," passport control is "protracted and painful." He states, "painful, in the sense of having to bribe officials and porters with cigarettes and money in order to ensure that the ordeal is not as protracted as it could be." Up until recently, Burmese laws prohibited any Burmese from conversing with a foreigner. Currently, conversation is punishable by jeopardizing Burmese family safety by the military intelligence, but chances are taken when officials can bribe foreigners. (Asian Survey 1 June 1997)

In a letter to the Editor of The Nation magazine, reference is made to "bad politics" in the Thai immigration office. The writer states that her friends endured jokes from Thai immigration officers about their country and leaders, and that their passports were disrespectfully thrown over the counters at them by immigration officials. (The Nation 17 August 1996)

However, passport control for NLD members is handled very seriously by the Burmese military junta. Reports indicate that the junta requests that the Thailand military arrest any Burmese dissident who illegally crosses the border. The dissidents are kept in detention until trial. (Agence France-Presse 27 November 1997)

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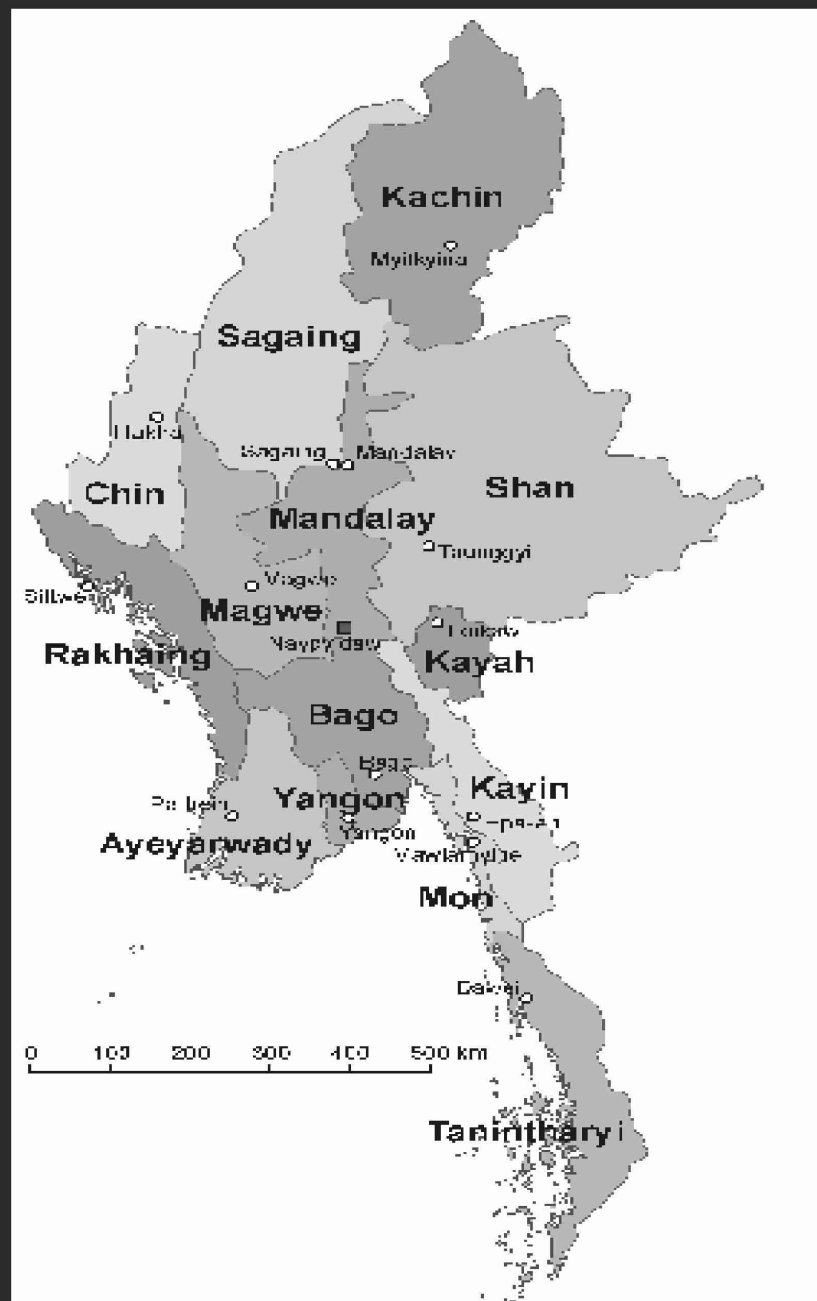
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Burma

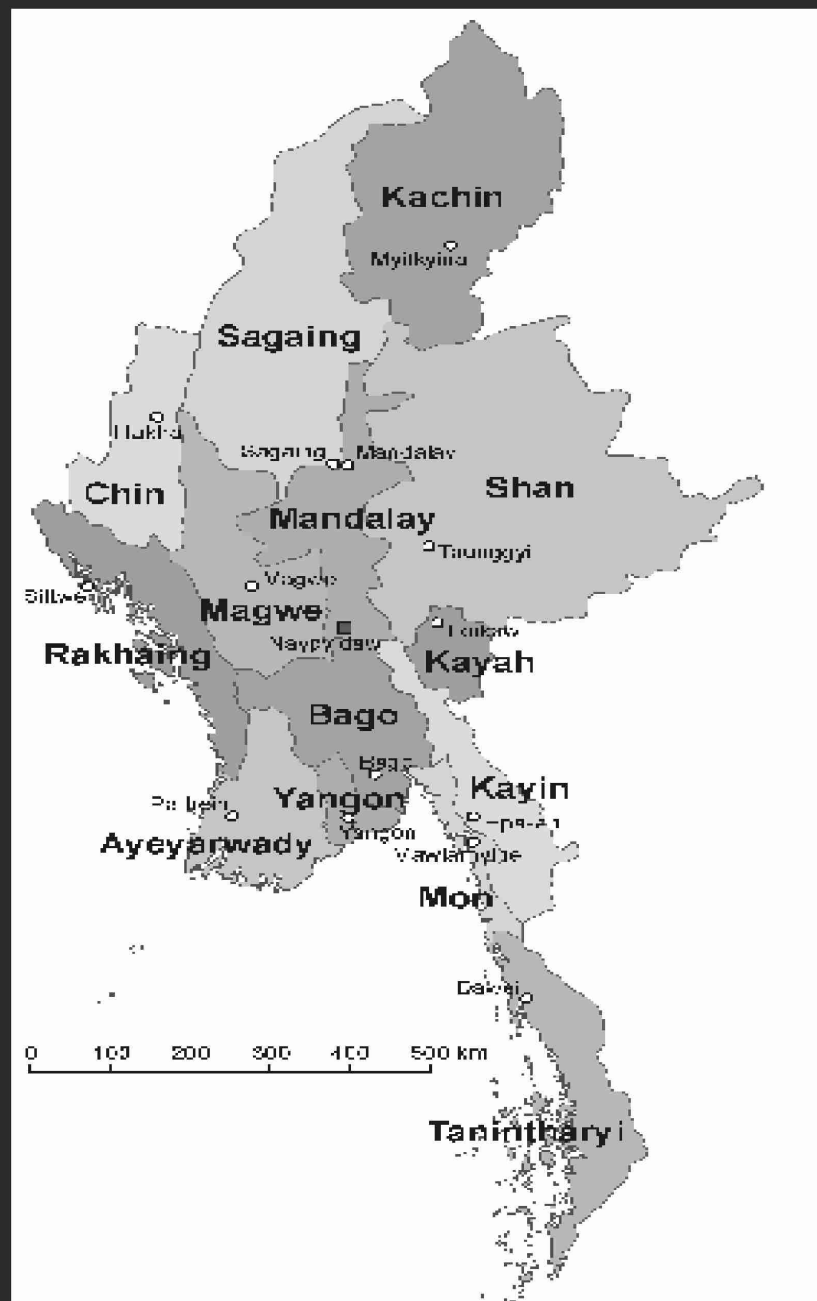
- Seven States
- Rakhaing (Arakan)
- Chin
- Kachin
- Shan
- Kayah (Karenni)
- Kayin (Karen)
- Mon








U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

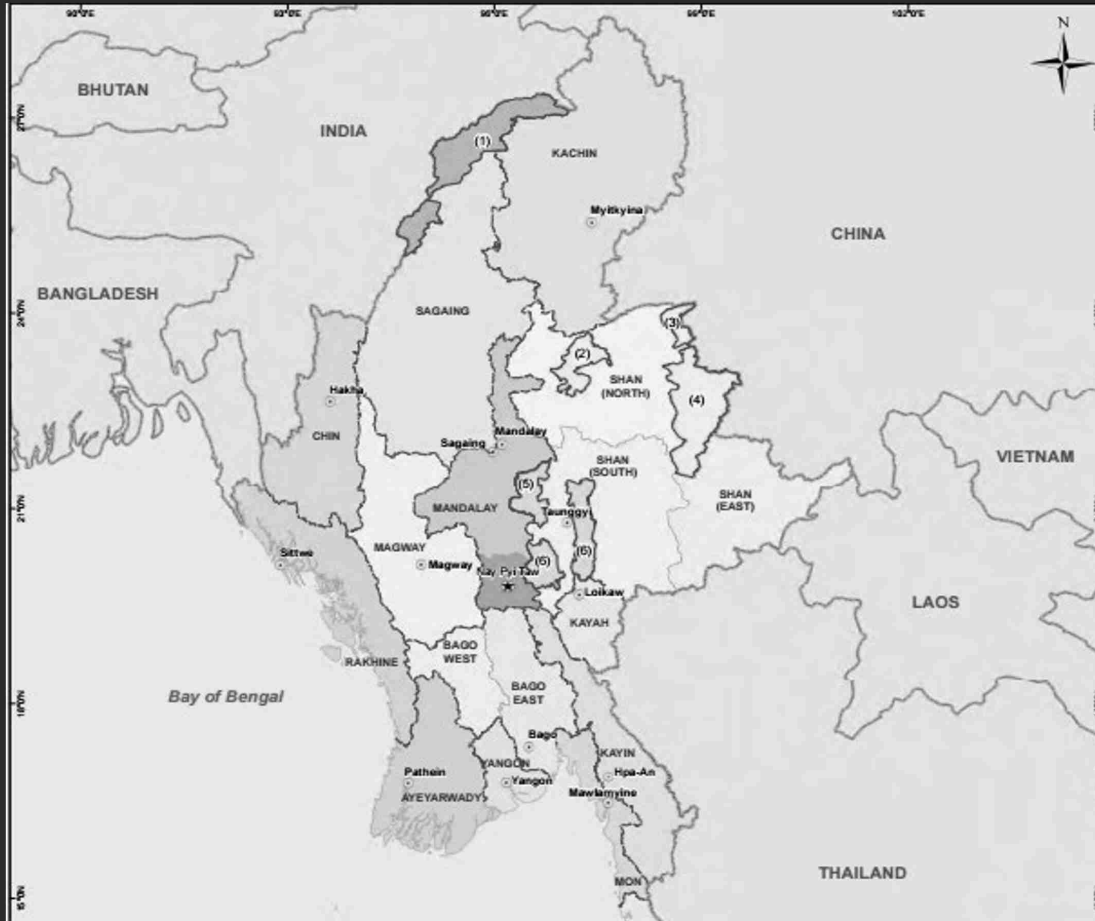
Burma

- Seven Regions
- Sagaing
- Mandalay
- Magwe
- Bago
- Yangon (Rangoon)
- Ayerawady
- Tanintharyi (Tenasserim)



Legend

 Capital	 Sea	(1). Naga Self-Administered Zone	(4). Wa Self-Administered Division
 State Capital	 International Boundary	(2). Pa Laung Self-Administered Zone	(5). Danu Self-Administered Zone
	 State Boundary	(3). Kokang Self-Administered Zone	(6). Pa-O Self-Administered Zone



TIBETO-BURMAN

Burman

Chin

Kachin

Rakhine

Other
1. Naga 2. Lahu
3. Akha

BURMAN AND MON-KHMER

KAREN

4. Pao
5. Kayan
6. Karenni

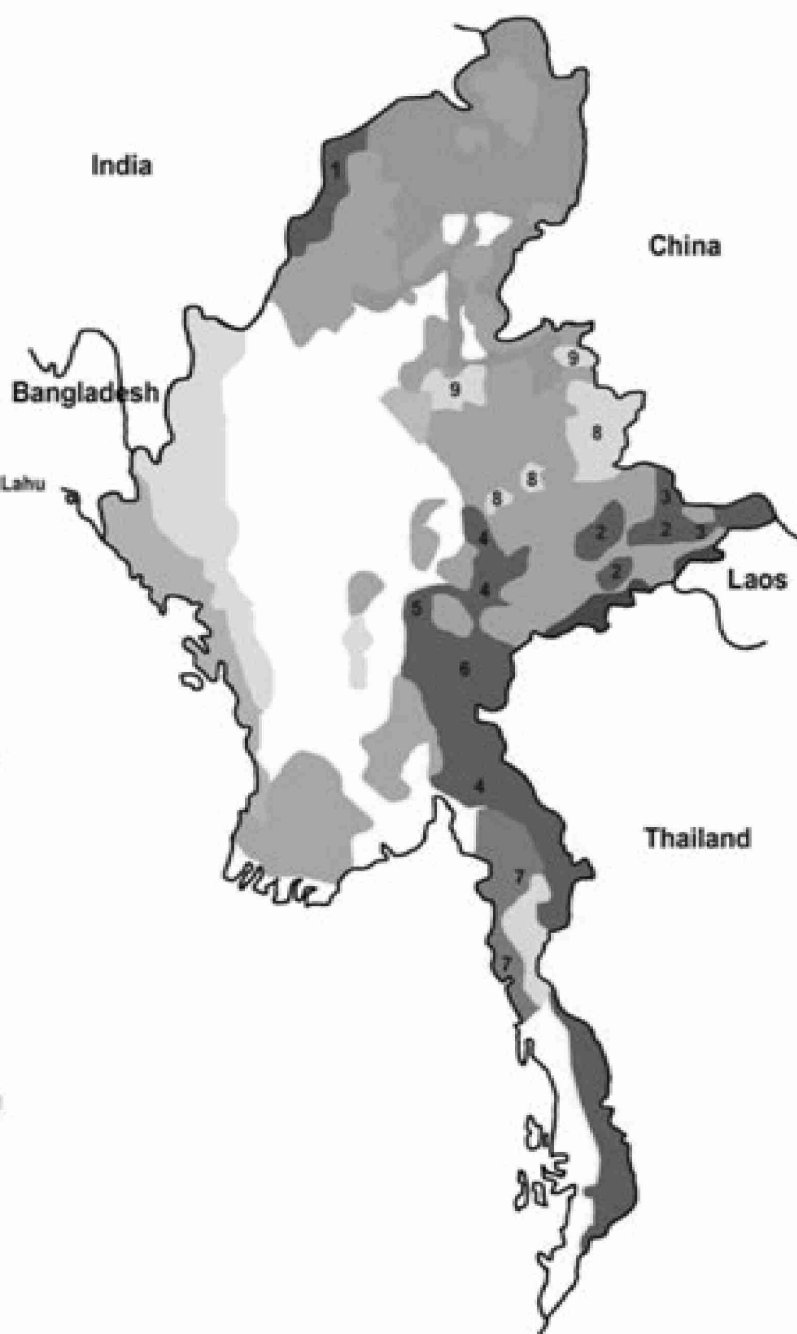
KAREN AND BURMAN

TAI
Shan

MON-KHMER
7. Mon
8. Wa
9. Palaung

BURMAN AND SHAN

SHAN AND WA



Major Ethnic Groups of Burma

Burmese Ethnicities

Four Commonly Encountered Examples

- Burman (Bamar)
- Chin
- Rakhine (Arakan)
- Karen



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Burman (Bamar)

- Approximately two-thirds of the population of Burma
- Tibeto-Burman language
- Bagan
- Colonization: early 19th century
- “Burmanization”: Myanmar (Bamar)



Rakhine (Arakan)

- 3.5 percent of population
- Indian origins: Dhanyawadi (4th century C.E.)
- Mostly Buddhist, minority Muslim
- Ethnic and linguistic similarity to Burmans
- Early outside contact: Mrauk-U, Bay of Bengal
- 18th Century Burman conquest
- Rakhine State's ethnic diversity



Chin

- About 2-2.5 percent of Burma's population
- Traditionally animist, with many Christian converts
- Linguistic diversity
- Geographically isolated until 19th Century...
- ... including from the Burman people
- Six major tribal groups:
 - (1) Asho, (2) Cho/Sho, (3) Khuami, (4) Laimi, (5) Mizo, and (6) Zomi/Kuki



Karen (Kayin)

- 6-8 % of Burma's population
- Majority Buddhist but around 25% Christian
- Sgaw and Pwo ethno-linguistic subgroups
- Distinct but closely related ethnicities: Karenni and Pa-O
- Long exposure to Burman power



World War II & Independent Burma

General Aung San

- World War II
- Independence Agreement (January 1947)
- Panglong Conference (February 1947)
- Assassination (July 1947)
- Constitution (September 1947)



The Panglong Agreement (February 1947)



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army

- 1949 KNDO formed (becomes KNLA in 1970s)
- 1990s KNU/KNLA administration in Karen State greatly weekend
- 1990s KNU/KNLA faces popular criticism
- 1994 – Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Burma Socialist Programme Party (1964-1988)

- General Ne Win

- Military-dominated party
- One-party government
- Suspended constitution of 1947. New constitution enacted in 1974.
- Dismantled federal system envisioned in Panglong Agreement
- Presided over intensified ethnic conflict



The Four Cuts



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Armed Conflict & Counterinsurgency

- The countryside was divided into three zones:
 - black** = controlled by insurgents,
 - brown** = disputed between government and insurgents,
 - white** = insurgent-free

“Strategic Villages”

“Free-Fire Zones”





U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

May 1990 Elections

State Law and Order Restoration Council

- Promoted the Burma Socialist Programme Party
- Repressed and de-registered opposition parties
- Expected to win elections

Opposition Parties

- Hundreds of parties legally registered
- National League for Democracy / Aung San Su Kyi
- United Nationalities Alliance
- Overwhelmingly won elections (NLD leading)



Chin National Front/Army

- March 1988:
Created in India
- 1988: SLORC takeover leads to militarization of Chin State
- Corresponding growth in the CNA's ranks.



Burma History 1990 - 2008

- 1993: constitutional convention convened
- 1996: military government suspended convention
- 1997 SLORC renamed itself :
 “State Peace and Development Council”
- 2004 convention re-convened (NLD boycotts)
- 2008 constitution ratified



Ceasefire Agreements and Ceasefire Groups

- From 1989 – 2007 approximately 27 armed groups concluded ceasefire agreements with the military.
- Ceasefire groups administered their own “Special Regions”.



Main armed groups in northern Burma. Areas are approximate, status of some groups changed



AREAS UNDER CONTROL OF CEASE-FIRE GROUPS

- NDA-K
- KIO
- PSLA
- KDA
- MNDA
- SSNA
- UWSP
- NDAA
- SEA-N
- SNPLO
- PNO
- KNLP
- KNPLF

AREAS WITH PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS

- VARIOUS MILITIAS

AREAS WITH GUERRILLA WARFARE

- SEA-SOUTH
- KNPP

Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

Junta-Controlled Militias

- In December 1994, the DKBA was formed by former Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers.
- From its inception it was controlled by and loyal to the Junta.
- On March 11, 1998 the DKBA attacked Huay Kaloke refugee camp in Thailand.



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Constitutional Referendum: 2008

- In 2008 the military government organized a “referendum” on the constitution, from which the NLD was excluded.



“Border Guard Forces”?

- April 2009 order
- Pressuring ceasefire groups to convert to “border guard forces” was an important part of the military government’s strategy to “legitimize” the new 2008 constitution.
- This process required them to standardize the size of their units (326 troop battalion, including 30 soldiers transferred from the Burmese military) and to accept more military control over their leadership (one of the three commanding officers).
- Brigade 5 of the DKBA did not agree to become a border guard force.



Elections: November 2010

- Union Solidarity and Development Party, main vehicle of the SPDC government, was the overwhelming victor in both houses of parliament and most state/region assemblies.
- Members of Karen, Chin, Rakhine, and other ethnic parties, 16 parties in total, were elected to ethnic state legislatures.
- National League for Democracy and most other parties going back to 1990 election boycotted elections.
- Ethnic parties that had formed the United Nationalities Alliance in the 1990 elections also boycotted.



Post-election violence

- September 2010 “border guard force” deadline was not met by several groups.
- Immediately after election DKBA Brigade 5 begins fighting with Burmese military near Myawaddy and Three Pagodas Pass (eastern border region).
- 20,000+ refugees flee to Thailand / hundreds of casualties
- Fighting continued, with KNU and All Burma Students Democratic Front also playing a role.



New Peace Initiatives

- “Border Guard Force” proposal was temporarily retooled in order to accommodate the ceasefire groups.
- In the second half of 2011 and the first half of 2012 the Burmese government concluded ceasefire agreements with most of the remaining armed opposition groups, including:
 - Karen National Union (January 2012)
 - Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (February 2012)
 - Chin National Front (January 2012)
 - Arakan Liberation Party (April 2012)
 - Kachin Independence Army ceasefire *broke down* in 2011



By-elections: April 2012

- Elections were for a small minority of seats in legislatures.
- In January 2012, 300 high-profile political prisoners were released, many of whom traveled abroad and/or became candidates for office.
- In April elections, 43 NLD representatives, including Aung San Su Kyi, were elected.
- NLD now largest opposition party



Elections: November 2015

- November 2015 Elections won by National League for Democracy
- October 2015: Multilateral ceasefire agreement concluded with 8 groups.
- Currently 10 groups are part of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.



November 2015 Election Results (National Legislature):

Party	Lower House	Upper House	TOTAL	% elected	% incl. mil
National League for Democracy (NLD)	255	135	390	79.4%	59.4%
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	30	11	41	8.4%	6.2%
Arakan National Party (ANP)	12	10	22	4.5%	3.3%
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)	12	3	15	3.1%	2.3%
Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party (TPNP)	3	2	5	1.0%	0.8%
Pao National Organization (PNO)	3	1	4	0.8%	0.6%
Zomi Congress for Democracy Party (ZCDP)	2	2	4	0.8%	0.6%
<i>Independent candidates</i>	1	2	3	0.6%	0.5%
Lisu National Development Party (LisuNDP)	2	0	2	0.4%	0.3%
Kachin State Development Party (KSDP)	1	0	1	0.2%	0.2%
Kokang Democracy and Unity Party (KDUP)	1	0	1	0.2%	0.2%
Mon National Party (MNP)	0	1	1	0.2%	0.2%
National Unity Party (NUP)	0	1	1	0.2%	0.2%
Wa Democratic Party (WDP)	1	0	1	0.2%	0.2%
	323	168	491	100.00%	74.73%
				Military:	25.27%⁵¹



November 2015 Election Results (State and Regional Legislatures):

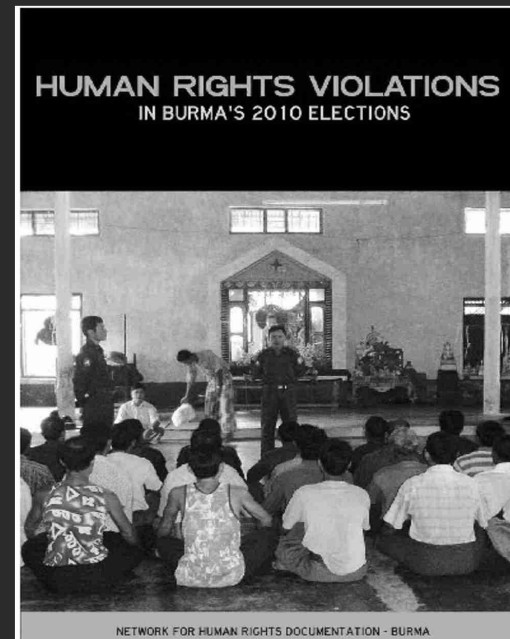
Appendix C: Election Results in the State and Region Assemblies

	NLD	USDP	Ethnic	Military	TOTAL	Balance of power
State assemblies						
Chin	12	4	2	6	24	NLD virtual majority (50%)
Kachin	26	7	7	13	53	No majority: NLD 49%; mil 25%; USDP 13%, ethnic 13%
Kayah	11	4	0	5	20	NLD majority (55%)
Kayin	13	3	1	6	23	NLD majority (57%)
Mon	19	1	3	8	31	NLD majority (61%)
Rahkin	9	3	23 ⁵²	12	47	No majority: ANP 49%; mil 49%; NLD 19%; USDP 7%
Shan	23	33	47 ⁵³	39 ⁵⁴	142	No majority (USDP+military joint 51% majority) ⁵⁵
Region assemblies						
Ayeyarwady	51	3	0	18	72	NLD majority (71%)
Bago	55	2	0	19	76	NLD majority (72%)
Magway	51	0	0	17	68	NLD majority (75%)
Mandalay	48	8	0	19	76	NLD majority (63%). (One other seat: DPM.) ⁵⁶
Sagaing	69	5	2	25	101	NLD majority (68%)
Tanintharyi	21	0	0	7	28	NLD majority (75%)
Yangon	88	3	1	31	123	NLD majority (72%)
Total	496	76	86	225	884	



Human Rights Reporting

- Lack of transparency in Burma
- Historical variations in availability of information
 - Eastern Burma: Karen State
 - Western Burma: Chin State



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
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Chin Population

- Chin State
 - Estimated 500,000 as of 2006 (Chin Development Initiative)
- Other States/Regions in Burma
 - As of 2001, another 1,000,000 Chins were living in Sagaing, Magway (Magwe), Yangon (Rangoon), Bago (Pegu) and Ayeyawady (Irrawaddy) Divisions, Rakhine (Arakan) State and Naga Hills in Burma.
- India & Malaysia
 - Since 1988, estimates place more than 75,000 displaced Chin in India, and another 50,000 in Malaysia.
- Chin clans: divergent identities and dialects
 - The most common Chin dialects among the refugee population in Malaysia are Haka (Lai), Falam, Mizo, Mara, Lautu, Matu, Zophei, Sentshang, Zo and Zotung.



Human Rights Abuses: Chin State

- As of January 2011, 14 army battalions (an estimated 5,000) soldiers permanently were stationed at approximately 50 army camps in Chin State.
- In 2010, 1,768 attacks were directed against a relatively large body of civilian victims.
- Two southern townships in Chin State, Paletwa and Mindat, are home to 97 percent of all reported abductions and disappearances allegedly carried out by government and local police in Chin State.

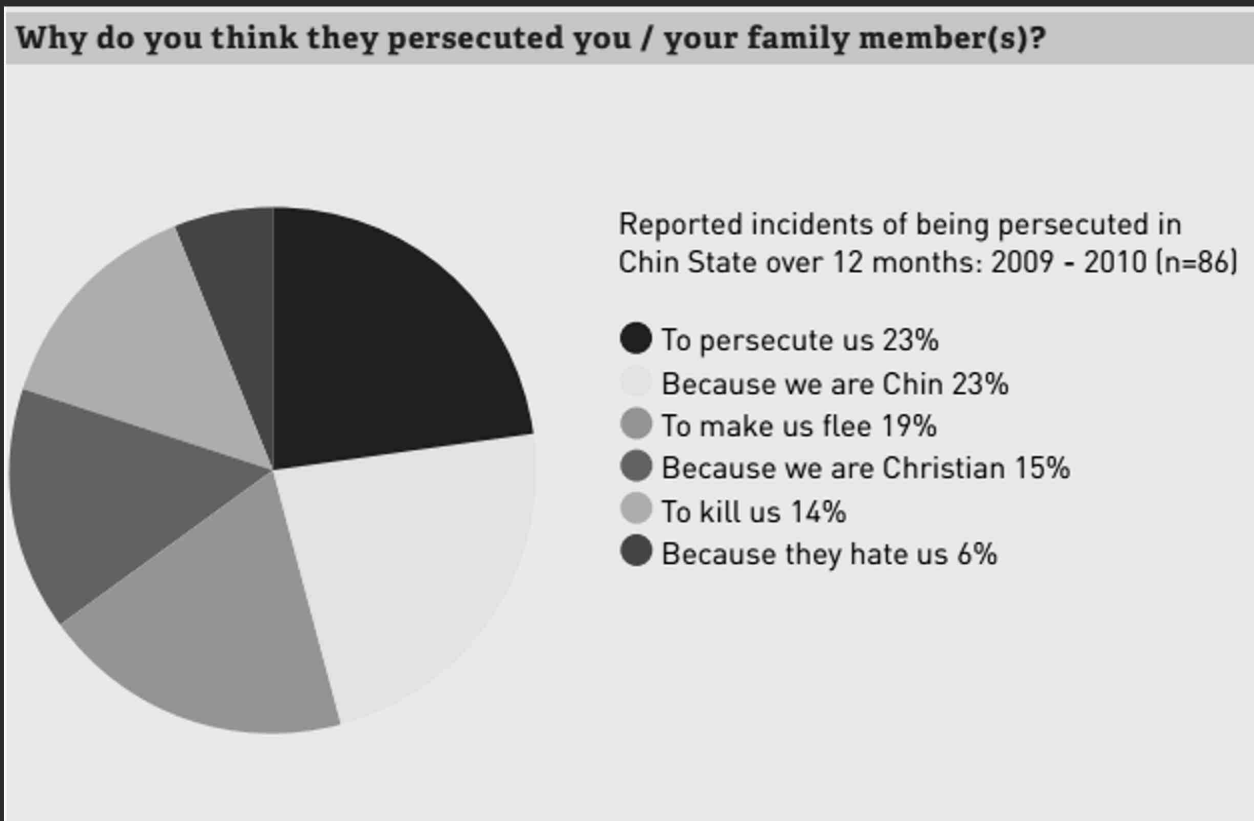


Human Rights Abuses: Chin State

- 91.9% of households reported forced labor, according to PHR's January 2011 report. 2/3 of reported forced labor demands came from the Burmese military.
- Hundreds of cases of forced conscription into military service, beatings, torture, intimidation, rape of women, children and men by soldiers, killings, disappearances, and, persecution based on Chin ethnicity or Christian faith
- Almost 15% of households reported at least one instance of torture.



Human Rights Abuses: Chin State



Current Situation: Chin State

- In March and April of 2015, a 2,000 soldier faction of the Arakan Army opened up a new front in Arakan and Chin States.
 - Hard-line Arakan nationalists wish to claim Paletwa township for Arakan State.
 - Multiple incidents have since occurred involving low-intensity conflict between the Burmese military and the Arakan Army.



Current Situation: Chin State

- Hundreds of people (perhaps 1700) were displaced to Mizoram in India, since more intense November 2017 clashes. Most have since returned but some remain.
- As expected, the Arakan Army (AA) has joined with the Federal Political Negotiation Council Consultative Commission (FPNCC), a coalition of groups not party to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.
- In February 2018, a bomb attack took place in the Rakhine city of Sittwe, in which the AA is the main suspect.



Karen Population

- Karen State
 - 1.3 million in Karen State
 - KNU estimates 2 – 2.4 million in more expansive Kaw Thoo Lei
- Other States/Regions in Burma
 - Approximately 3 – 5 million



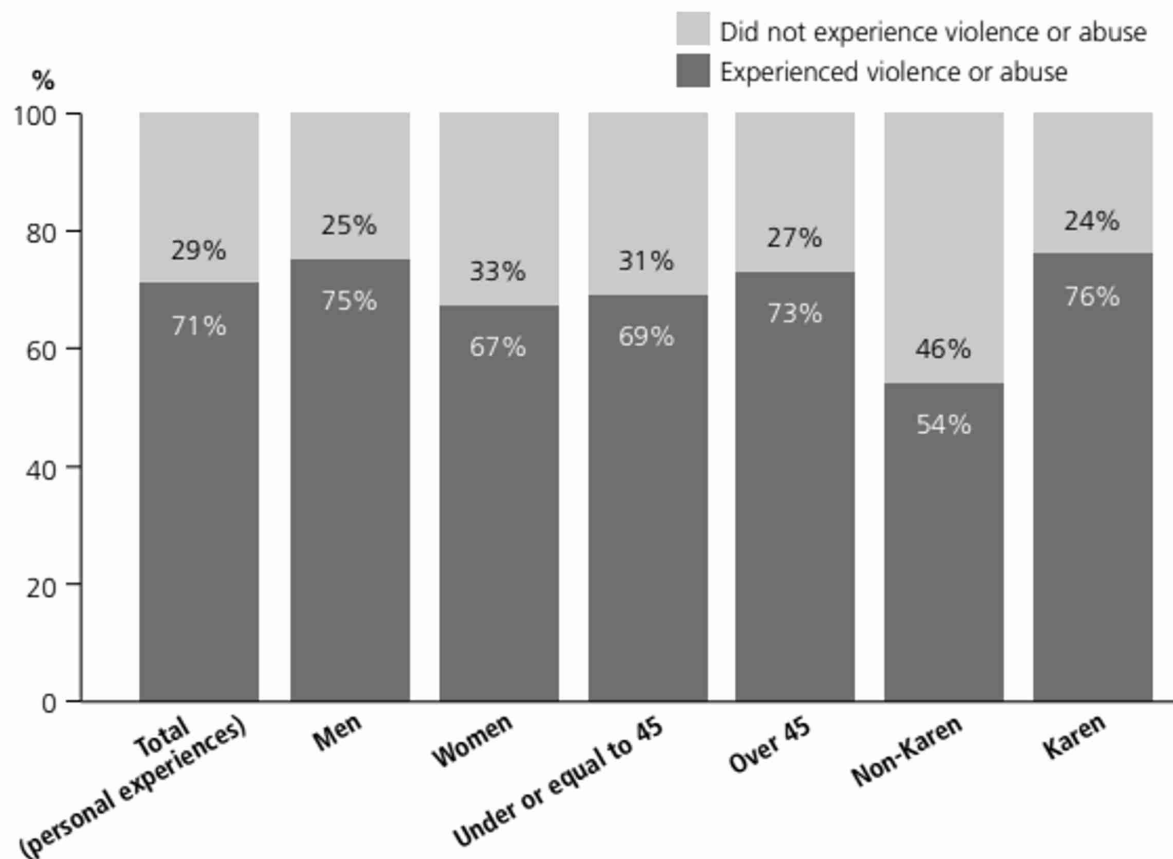
Karen Population

- Ethnicity
 - Pwo (mostly Christian and animist hill-dwellers) and S'ghaw (mostly lowland Buddhists) together make up 80-85% of the Karen population
- Religion
 - 25-40 percent of Karen are Christian; 5-10 percent are animist; remainder are Buddhist
- Location
 - 30 percent urban; 70 percent rural

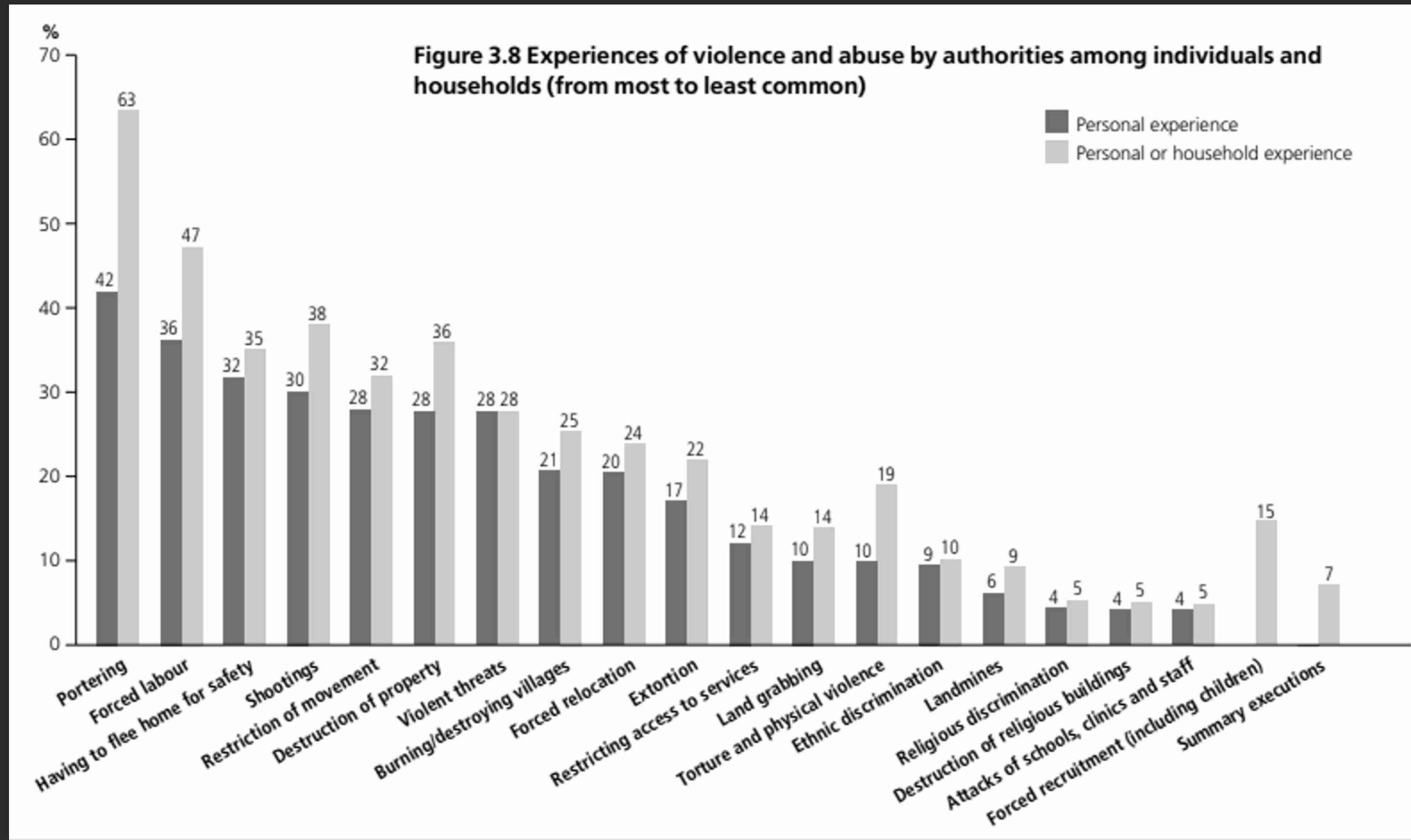


Human Rights Abuses: Karen areas

Figure 3.7 Respondents who personally experienced some form of violence or abuse



Human Rights Abuses: Karen State



Current Situation: Karen State

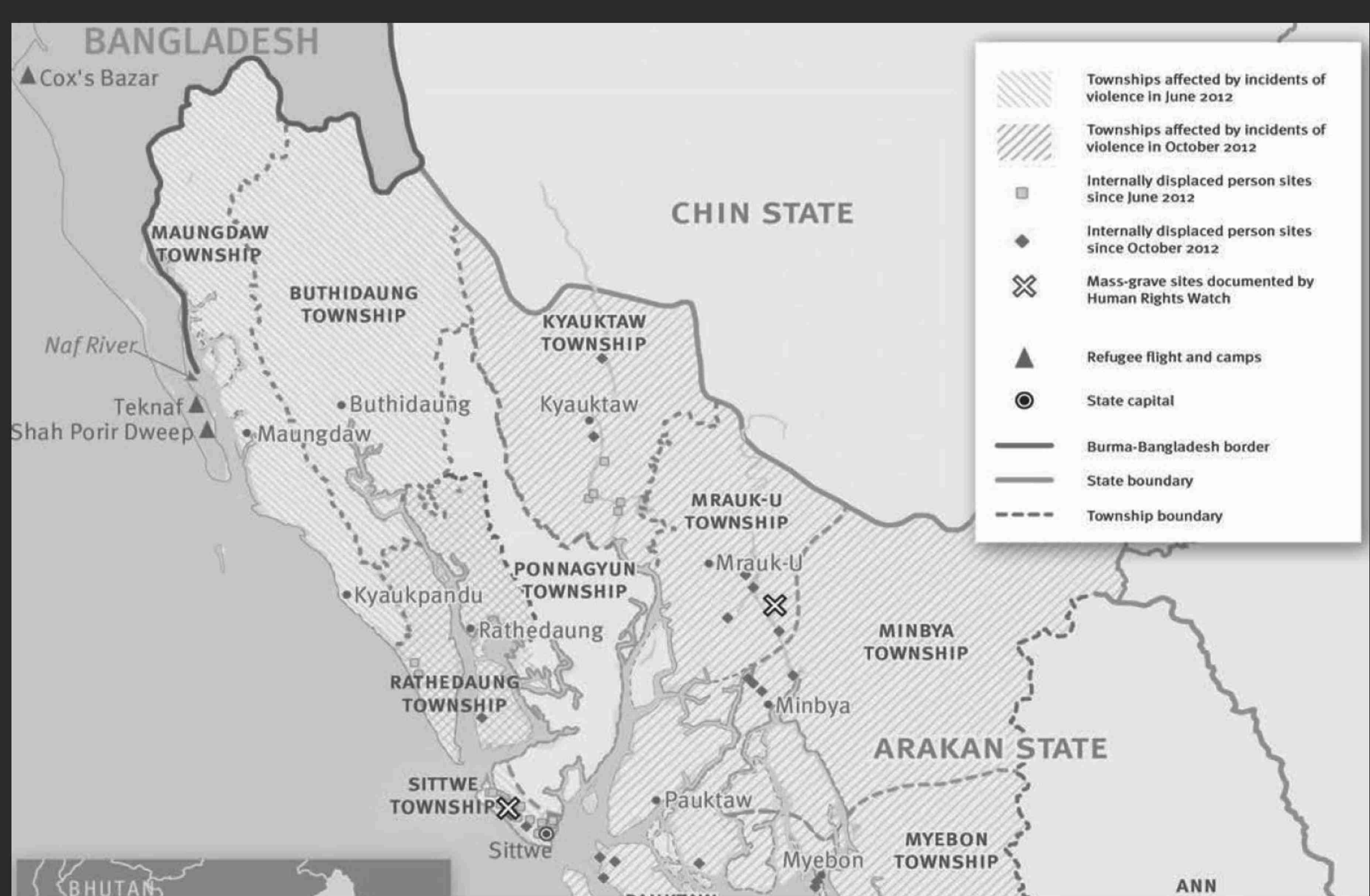
- The 2012 ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Burmese military formally ended one of the world longest-running conflicts.
- Parts of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army have come under the political leadership of the KNU, particularly the renamed (in 2015) Democratic Karen *Benevolent* Army.
- Periodic skirmishes between the KNLA, certain DKBA units, and the Burmese military have continued to occur.



Current Situation: Rakhine State

- Most Rakhine (Arakan) people are Theravada Buddhists
- Of Rakhine's Muslim population the majority are Rohingya, who are not officially recognized as an ethnic group in Burma
 - Rohingya have since the late 1970s been displaced to Bangladesh in large numbers on three occasions.
 - The most recent tensions between Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine began in 2011.
 - Since September 2017, the Burmese military's intervention has led to the largest ever mass displacement of Rohingya.







October 2016: Renewed violence in Rakhine State

- On October 9, 2016 three police stations were attacked in Maungdaw and Yathay Taung townships in Rakhine.
- Subsequently the Burmese armed forces greatly increased their presence in northern Rakhine State.
- Humanitarian organizations estimated that 15,000 additional Rohingya and 3000 other Rakhine people became displaced in Maungdaw township as a result of counter-insurgency operations by the government.
- Many of the Rohingya who had fled to Bangladesh in the last months of 2016 appeared to have returned in the first few months of 2017.



September 2017 - ?: Rohingya Crisis

- Late August 2017: Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Association (ARSA) attacks police and army posts in northern Rakhine state
- Burmese army reprisals kill at least 6,700 Rohingya by the end of September 2017.
- Total displacement to Bangladesh since September 2017 has been estimated at over 700,000
- November 2017 deal between Bangladesh and Burma on repatriation: vague and tentative



Current Situation: Arakan Army

- In Rakhine State, clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Burmese military have displaced perhaps 5000 people since December 2018.
- Since early January 2019, Burmese military deployments in Arakan State have raised concerns of intensified conflict in the state.
- Such conflict may take place in predominately Arakanese areas of the state, as opposed to only in the northern districts where Rohingya form the majority of the population.
- The AA denies having links with ARSA, which are alleged by the Burmese government.



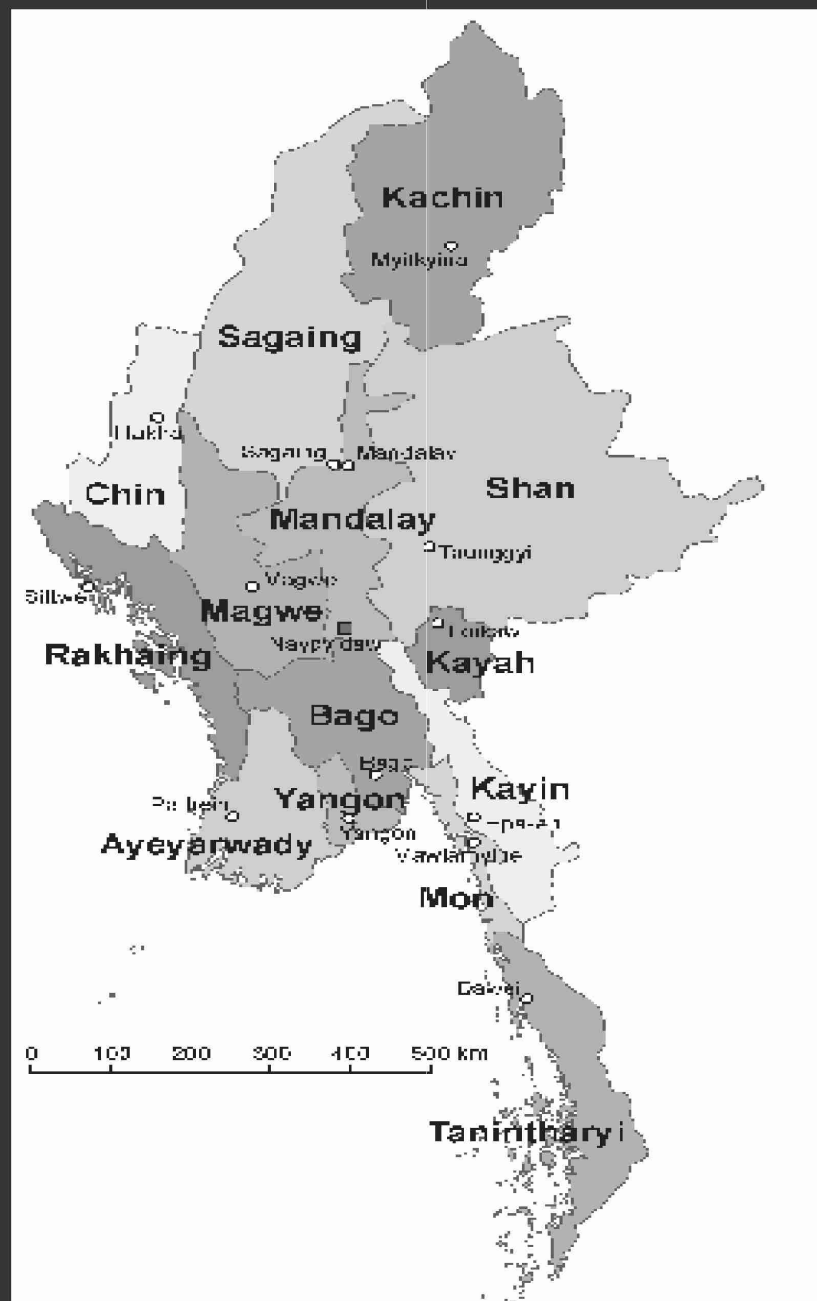
Burma Pre-Departure Briefing

- Administrative and Ethnic Geography
- History Overview (1947-2021)
- Rohingya Crisis
- Post-Coup Political Situation



Burma

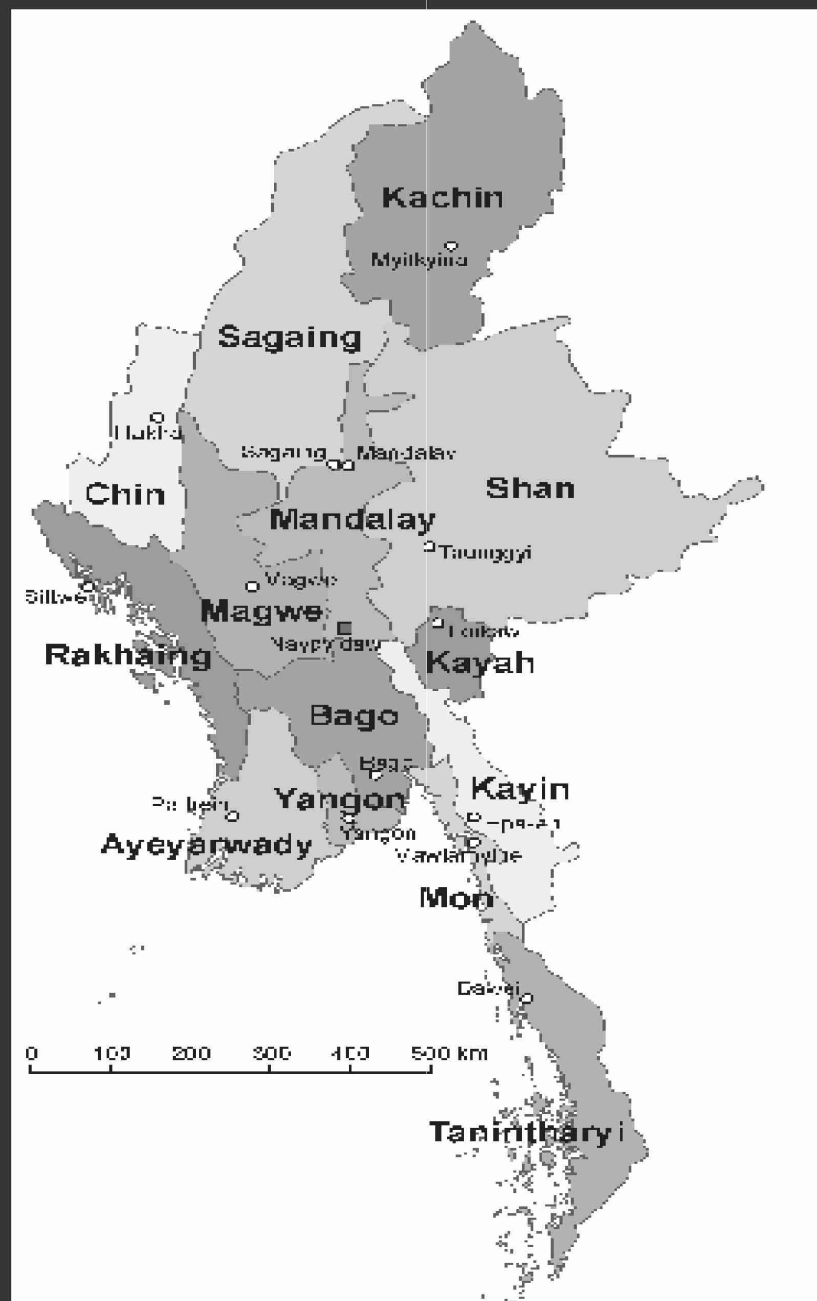
- Seven States
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U.S. Citizenship
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Services

Burma

- Seven Regions
- Sagaing
- Mandalay
- Magwe
- Bago
- Yangon (Rangoon)
- Ayerawady
- Tanintharyi (Tenasserim)



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Burmese Ethnicities

Four Commonly Encountered Examples

- Burman (Bamar)
- Rakhine (Arakan)
- Chin
- Karen



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

History Overview (1947-present)

- Independence to 1962 military coup
- 1988 protests and 1990 elections
- Ceasefire agreements and development of 2008 constitution
- Limited civilian government (2011-2021)



World War II & Independent Burma

General Aung San

- World War II
- Independence Agreement (January 1947)
- Panglong Conference (February 1947)
- Assassination (July 1947)
- Constitution (September 1947)



Burma Socialist Programme Party (1964-1988)

- General Ne Win

- Military-dominated party
- One-party government
- Suspended constitution of 1947. New constitution enacted in 1974.
- Dismantled federal system envisioned in Panglong Agreement
- Presided over intensified ethnic conflict



The Four Cuts



U.S. Citizenship
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August 1988 protest movement



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Chin National Front/Army

- March 1988:
Created in India
- 1988: military actions lead to militarization of Chin State
- Corresponding growth in the CNA's ranks.



Main armed groups in northern Burma. Areas are approximate, status of some groups changed



AREAS UNDER CONTROL OF CEASE-FIRE GROUPS

- NDA-K
- KIO
- PSLA
- KDA
- MNDA
- SSNA
- UWSP
- NDAA
- SEA-N
- SNPLO
- PNO
- KNLP
- KNPLF

AREAS WITH PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIAS

- VARIOUS MILITIAS

AREAS WITH GUERRILLA WARFARE

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- KNPP

Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

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- From its inception it was controlled by and loyal to the Junta.
- On March 11, 1998 the DKBA attacked Huay Kaloke refugee camp in Thailand.

Junta-Controlled Militias



Limited Civilian Government (2011-2021)

- November 2010 elections
- April 2012 by-elections & November 2015 elections
- 21st Century Panglong Conference
- November 2020 elections



Rohingya from Burma



Rohingya people in Rakhine (Arakan) State in Myanmar

- - Rohingya majority
- - Rohingya minority



U.S. Citizenship
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Who are the Rohingya?

- Muslims of Arakan State
- Arrived in Arakan State beginning in the 8th Century
- Term 'Rohingya' derives from earlier terms, but its contemporary meaning is of recent origin
- Speak a dialect of Chittagonian, itself closely related to Bengali
- Not a recognized minority under the Citizenship Act of 1982
- Mostly unable to obtain Burmese citizenship -- Stateless



Rohingya Refugees



Three Crises:

- February – July 1978
- 1991-1992
- August 2017 - present



U.S. Citizenship
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Conditions in Northern Rakhine State



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Burmese Authorities

- Myanmar Police Force/Border Guard Police
- Burmese army (*tatmadaw*)



Rohingya Organizations

- Rohingya Solidarity Organization

(approx. 1980 – 2001)

- Haraka al-Yaqin/Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Army

(2016 – present)



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services



Conclusions

- Rohingya – a stateless minority group in Burma
- August 2017 – historically largest Rohingya refugee crisis
- ARSA – a threat and an excuse for violence

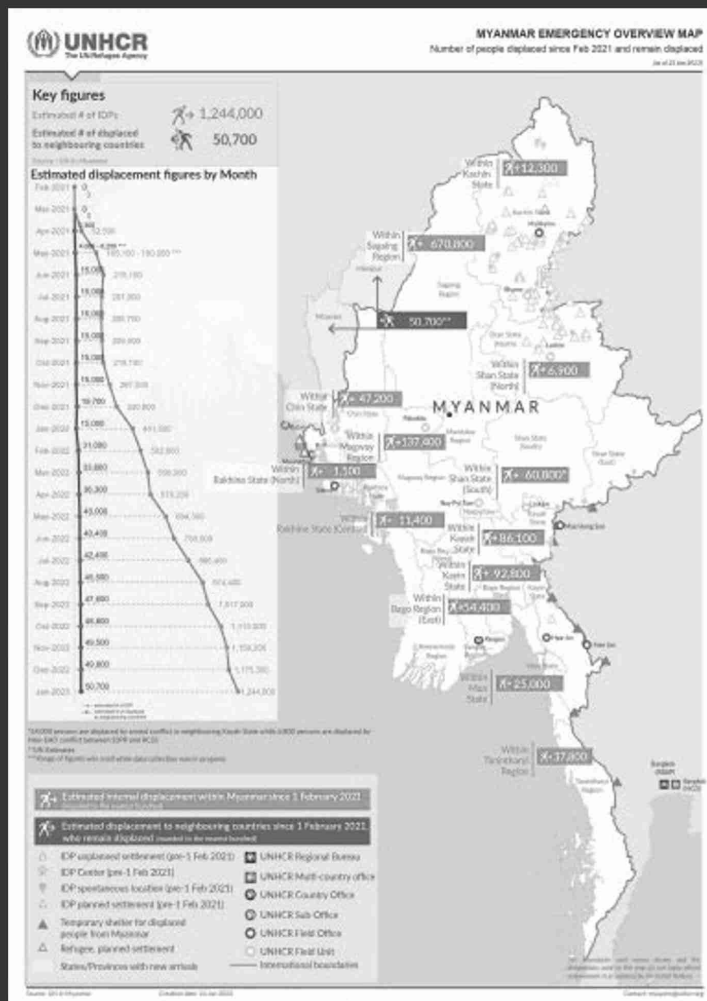


February 2021 Coup

- State Administration Council (SAC)
- Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH)
- National Unity Government (NUG)
- People's Defense Force(s) (PDF)
- New Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)
 - Chinland Defense Force
 - Karenni Nationalities Defense Force



Post-coup Developments



- Protests
- Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)
- Arrests of political activists^{22.1}
- Mobilization of opposition forces
- Attacks by *Tatmadaw*



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Post-coup Refugees & IDPs^{24.1}

WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

In the South-East, the number of IDPs decreased from 350,300 last week to 350,100 this week. I

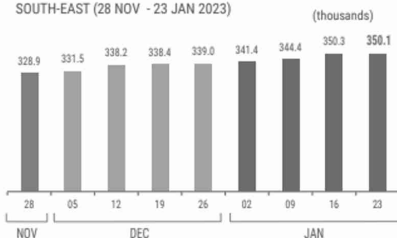
In Kayin State, 120 people have newly been displaced within the same townships of Hpapun and Kyainseikgyi following airstrikes on 21 January. In addition, 43 IDPs from Hpapun Township have been displaced yet again, and sought safety in Hpapun town and Myaing Gyi Ngu area.

In Mon State, 1,127 IDPs in Kyaikto Township returned to their villages of origin in the same township.

Due to increased fighting on 20 January in Tanintharyi Region, 2,000 people were displaced within Palaw Township. In Dawei Township, Tanintharyi Region, 1,125 IDPs returned to their village of origin.

WEEKLY DISPLACEMENT FIGURES⁽¹⁾

SOUTH-EAST (28 NOV - 23 JAN 2023)

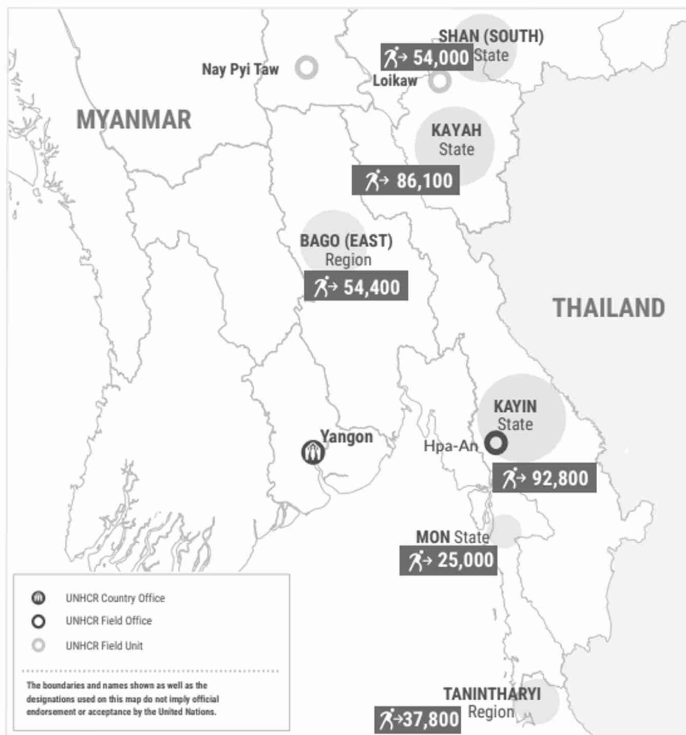


Source: UN in Myanmar as of (23 January 2023)

350,100⁽¹⁾

Source: UN in Myanmar

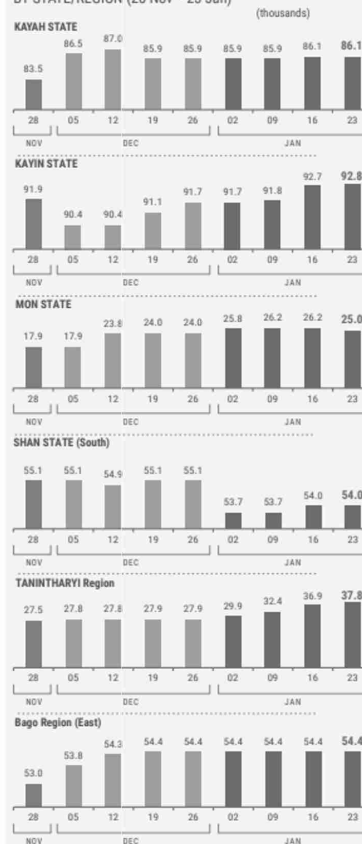
People who are estimated to be displaced by conflict in SE Myanmar (as of 23 Jan 2023).



⁽¹⁾ Numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred by state.

WEEKLY DISPLACEMENT FIGURES⁽²⁾

BY STATE/REGION (28 Nov - 23 Jan)



Feedback: MYAHAIM@unhcr.org

Web Portal: Myanmar South East Working Group.



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Burma Update: May 2022 – January

2023 [25.1](#), [25.2](#), [25.3](#), [25.4](#)

- Increasing opposition control of territory:
 - NUG's People's Defense Force (PDF)
 - Long-standing Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)
 - Local or regional people's defense forces (pdfs)
- Continued abuses against coup opponents, including arrests under 505A.



Recommended Readings

- [Understanding the People's Defense Forces in Myanmar](#), U.S. Institute of Peace, Nov. 3, 2022
- [SAC-M: JUST 17PC OF TERRITORY IN MYANMAR UNDER STABLE JUNTA CONTROL AS CONFLICT TRAJECTORY FAVOURS RESISTANCE](#), Special Advisory Council – Myanmar, Sep. 5, 2022.
- Michael Martin, [News from the Front: Observations from Myanmar's Revolutionary Forces](#), Center for Strategic and International Studies, Dec. 5, 2022.
- [Myanmar's Coup Shakes Up Its Ethnic Conflicts](#), International Crisis Group, Jan. 12, 2022
- [ARSA After the Myanmar Coup: Between a Rock and a Hard Place](#), The Diplomat, Jan. 24, 2022
- [Myanmar: Cease persecution of journalists](#), Amnesty International, May 27, 2021



Questions?

(b)(6)

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- RAIO Research Division Asia
Teams Channel
- Contact an individual RD team
member

A video explaining the procedures for communicating with the RD is available here. Please view it when you have a chance if you have questions about interaction with the RD.



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Endnotes

- 22.1 [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#) (*last visited* Jan. 30, 2023)
- 23.1 [Myanmar Emergency Overview Map \(as of Jan. 23, 2023\)](#), U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Jan. 23, 2023
- 24.1 [Myanmar Southeast – Emergency Overview Map \(as of Jan. 23, 2023\)](#), U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Jan. 23, 2023.
- 25.1 Michael Martin, [News from the Front: Observations from Myanmar’s Revolutionary Forces](#), Center for Strategic and International Studies, Dec. 5, 2022.
- 25.2 [SAC-M: JUST 17PC OF TERRITORY IN MYANMAR UNDER STABLE JUNTA CONTROL AS CONFLICT TRAJECTORY FAVOURS RESISTANCE](#), Special Advisory Council – Myanmar, Sep. 5, 2022.
- 25.3 [Understanding the People’s Defense Forces in Myanmar](#), U.S. Institute of Peace, Nov. 3, 2022
- 25.4 [Myanmar: Cease persecution of journalists](#), Amnesty International, May 27, 2021



Resource Guide: Burma

Note: Using CTRL + F toggles all of the sections after the first open/closed. If used upon entering the page, everything will open, allowing you to search for a specific term. Using CTRL + F again will close all the sections.

Overview

- Burma, CIA World Factbook
- Myanmar, BBC
- Myanmar, World Bank

Country Reports

- Myanmar Study Group: Final Report - Anatomy of the Military Coup and Recommendations for a U.S. Response (U.S. Institute of Peace, Feb. 1, 2022)
- Myanmar: An Enduring Intelligence State or a State Enduring Intelligence? (Stimson Center, Apr. 7, 2021)
- 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices -- Burma (U.S. Department of State, Mar. 2023)
- 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Burma (DOS Apr. 2022)
- 2021 International Religious Freedom Report - Burma (DOS Jun. 2022)
- Annual Reports - Burma (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom)
- World Report 2022: Events of 2021 - Myanmar (HRW Jan. 2022)
- Freedom in the World 2022 - Myanmar (Freedom House Feb. 2022)
- Myanmar (Amnesty International, March 2022)
- Myanmar (Council on Foreign Relations)
- Myanmar Peace Monitor
- Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

Media Sources

- Frontier Myanmar
- The Irrawaddy
- New York Times -- Myanmar
- BBC News -- Myanmar
- The Indian Express -- Myanmar
- Al-Jazeera News -- Myanmar

Maps

- Myanmar UNHCR displacement overview (June 14, 2021).pdf
- Myanmar Emergency Overview Map (UNHCR, Dec. 27, 2021).pdf
- Myanmar's Borderlands - Protracted Emergency & the Coup - Prof. D. Brenner.pptx

Region-Specific Resources

Chin State

- In Myanmar's Chin State, a grassroots rebellion grows (Reuters, Dec. 12, 2021)
- Another Wave of Atrocity Crimes in Chin State (HRW, Nov. 4, 2021)
- The United States Condemns Reported Attacks in Chin State (U.S. Dept. of State, Oct 31, 2021)
- Life Under the Junta: Evidence of Crimes Against Humanity in Burma's Chin State (Physicians for Human Rights, Jan. 2011)
- Chin Human Right Organization

Kachin State

- Under Siege in Kachin State, Burma (Physicians for Human Rights, Nov. 2011)

Karen State

- Security, Justice, and Governance in Southeast Myanmar (Saferworld, Jan. 2019)
- Bitter Wounds and Lost Dreams: Human Rights Under Assault in Karen State, Burma (Physicians for Human Rights, Aug. 2012)
- Human Rights and Land Confiscation in Karen State (HRW 2016)
- Convict Porters on the Front Lines in Eastern Burma (HRW 2011)
- Karen Human Rights Group

Rakhine State

- Avoiding a Return to War in Myanmar's Arakan State (International Crisis Group, Jun. 1, 2022)
- Myanmar Military Clashes with Arakan Army Threatening Ceasefire (The Diplomat, Feb. 8, 2022)
- Myanmar's military coup prolongs misery for Rohingya in Rakhine (Al-Jazeera, Jan. 6, 2022)
- Rumbles in Rakhine amid strains between Myanmar military, rebels (Al-Jazeera, Nov. 24, 2021)
- After Myanmar's Military Coup, Arakan Army Accelerates Implementation of the 'Way of Rakhita' (The Diplomat, Apr. 14, 2021)
- Documentation of Atrocities in Northern Rakhine State (USDOS, Sept. 2018)
- Rohingya refugees' perspectives on their displacement in Bangladesh (Humanitarian Policy Group/International Rescue Committee, Jun. 2019)
- The Rohingya Crisis (Human Rights Watch, updated regularly)
- The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar's Rohingya Refugee Crisis (ICG)

Politics & Religious Violence

Politics

- Understanding the People's Defense Forces in Myanmar (U.S. Institute for Peace, Nov. 3, 2022)
- Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process: A Reference Guide (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2016)
- The Cost of the Coup: Myanmar Edges Toward State Collapse (International Crisis Group, Apr. 2021)
- The Deadly Stalemate in Post-Coup Myanmar (International Crisis Group, Oct. 20, 2021)
- 'How can we fight without weapons?' (Frontier Myanmar, Jan. 6, 2022)
- Myanmar's Coup Shakes Up Its Ethnic Conflicts (International Crisis Group, Jan. 12, 2022)

Religious Violence

- The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar (International Crisis Group, Oct. 1, 2013)
- Patterns of Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma (Physicians for Human Rights, Aug. 2013)
- Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar (International Crisis Group, Sep. 5, 2017)

Other Sources

- Myanmar Information Management Unit (Swiss Embassy in Myanmar)

Research Unit Products

- Burma COI Briefing (January 31, 2023)
- Information on Muslims in Burma and Their Mistreatment by Nationalist Groups (Jan. 18, 2022)
- Information on the Relationship of the Rohingya Language to Chittagonian and Rakhine (Jan. 2, 2018)
- Significant Events Relating to the Thai-Burma Border Area (Aug. 2011 – Apr. 2012)



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS CONSIDERATIONS: BURMA (UNION OF MYANMAR) (March 2021)

FEBRUARY 1 MILITARY COUP

On February 1, 2021, the armed forces of Myanmar seized power in a coup against the democratically elected government of Aung Sang Suu Kyi, who was taken into custody along with other leaders of her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD).¹ The military leadership declared a one-year state of emergency after the coup, which came just before parliament was to sit for the first time since last November's elections, in which Suu Kyi's party, the NLD, won a large majority of seats.² Immediately after the coup, there were disruptions of internet and cellular service, state television went off air, security checkpoints were set up in major cities, banks temporarily suspended services, and "[t]roops and riot police stood by in Yangon where residents rushed to markets to stock up on supplies and others lined up at ATMs to withdraw cash."³ The military imposed a curfew, across the country, from 8pm until 6am.⁴

Criminal charges against Suu Kyi followed two days after the coup. The initial charges, relating to violations of import law, were "widely seen as a pretext to keep her detained," as were subsequent charges relating to alleged violations of laws relating to natural disaster management.⁵ Suu Kyi was reported to be in good health immediately following her house arrest.⁶ The number of officials, lawmakers and political activists reported to be in detention by the military was estimated, as of February 5th, to be over 400.⁷ The whereabouts of many of the detained were not known.⁸

International relief flights were temporarily suspended after the coup but, according to the privately-owned Myanmar Times, they were to resume three times a week between Yangon International Airport and Kuala Lumpur beginning February 3rd.⁹

¹ *Myanmar military seizes power, detains elected leader Aung San Suuu Kyi*, Reuters, Feb. 1, 2021.

² *Myanmar military seizes power, detains elected leader Aung San Suuu Kyi*, Reuters, Feb. 1, 2021.

³ *Myanmar military seizes power, detains elected leader Aung San Suuu Kyi*, Reuters, Feb. 1, 2021; *Tight Security in Myanmar Cities after Military Seizes Power*, Radio Free Asia, Feb. 1, 2021.

⁴ *Myanmar's military stages coup d'etat: Live news*, Al-Jazeera, Feb. 1, 2021.

⁵ *Myanmar's Coup, Explained*, New York Times, Feb. 5, 2020.

⁶ *Myanmar President Moved from Official Residence, Suu Kyi in Good Health*, The Irrawaddy, Feb. 5, 2021.

⁷ *Myanmar President Moved from Official Residence, Suu Kyi in Good Health*, The Irrawaddy, Feb. 5, 2021;

Myanmar grinds to a halt as hundreds of thousands strike against military coup, Washington Post, Feb. 22, 2021.

⁸ *Myanmar Has 134 More Political Prisoners Following Military Coup*, The Irrawaddy, Feb. 5, 2021.

⁹ *Relief flights to and from Myanmar permitted to resume*, Myanmar Times, Feb. 2, 2021.

In the days after the coup, public protests began to take place in various parts of the country, including some that occurred on a nightly basis and some with hundreds of participants, in spite of the government’s blocking of social media websites.¹⁰

ONGOING VIOLENCE AND OTHER ABUSES

In the month after the coup, the Burmese military government continued and increased its use of violence and other abuses against protesters and political opponents. On February 9, a young woman was hospitalized after being shot in the head during a protest. She died about a week later.¹¹ On February 20, police killed two more demonstrators, who were participating in a protest at a Mandalay dockyard, part of a civil disobedience campaign involving work stoppages.¹² The number of fatal shootings have since increased markedly. On February 28, the United Nations reported that the military killed at least 18 people at demonstrations in several cities across the country, including Yangon, Mandalay, Dawei, Myeik, Bago and Pokokku.¹³ In the southern city of Dawei, more than 50 people were also wounded (three were reportedly killed) when police opened fire on a crowd of hundreds.¹⁴ On March 3, at least 26 protesters were reported to have been killed in Yangon, Monywa, Mandalay and other cities, while “[a]cross the country, many protesters and bystanders suffered injuries from live ammunition, tear gas, and beatings by security forces in broad daylight during crackdowns on anti-junta demonstrators.”¹⁵ A later estimate put the number of people killed on March 3 at 38.¹⁶ The United Nations Special Rapporteur has condemned the “excessive and lethal force” being used against the protesters and called on the military government to “relinquish the power that it assumed through an illegal coup.”¹⁷

Burmese police and security forces have also expanded the use of arrests of coup opponents, including in feared night-time raids.¹⁸ Laws requiring court orders for detentions lasting more than 24 hours and for searching private property have reportedly been suspended.¹⁹ On February 21, in Yangon, police shot and killed a man who was participating in a “neighborhood watch” patrol of the kind intended to deter police from engaging night-time arrests.²⁰ As of February 25, according

¹⁰ *Myanmar coup: Teachers join growing protests against military*, BBC News, Feb. 5, 2021; *Myanmar: “A coup is worse than covid. I’ve lived through three”*, The Economist, Feb. 5, 2021.

¹¹ *Myanmar coup: Woman shot at protest fights for life*, BBC News, Feb. 10; *Myanmar coup: Woman shot during anti-coup protests dies*, BBC News, Feb. 19, 2021.

¹² *Mass protests and funeral follow deadly shootings in Myanmar*, NBC News/Associated Press, Feb. 21, 2021.

¹³ *Military Crackdown in Myanmar Escalates With Killing of Protesters*, New York Times, Feb. 28, 2021.

¹⁴ *Military Crackdown in Myanmar Escalates With Killing of Protesters*, New York Times, Feb. 28, 2021.

¹⁵ *At Least 26 Protesters Killed Across Myanmar as Security Forces Continue Bloody Crackdowns*, Radio Free Asia, Mar. 3, 2021.

¹⁶ *The shooting starts*, The Economist, Mar. 6, 2021.

¹⁷ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, U.N. Human Rights Council, Mar. 4, 2021.

¹⁸ *Myanmar coup: Fear and defiance at night-time arrests*, BBC News, Feb. 13, 2021.

¹⁹ *Myanmar coup: Fear and defiance at night-time arrests*, BBC News, Feb. 13, 2021.

²⁰ *Myanmar security forces open fire on protesters, killing at least 18, according to U.N.*, Washington Post, Feb. 28, 2021; *Myanmar residents on night patrol as coup tensions deepen*, Agence-France Press, Feb. 15, 2021.

to the Yangon-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, at least 728 people had been arrested, charged, or sentenced in relation to the protests.²¹ An estimate published on March 7, said that nearly 1800 people had been arrested in connection with the crackdown on demonstrators since the coup.²²

ECONOMIC INSECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

The February 1 coup has led to ongoing stresses on Burma's economy, including by precipitating work stoppages that have continued and grown in scope since the days following the coup. By February 12, "several thousand staff from government ministries and key businesses, including banks and military-owned enterprises" had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), begun by doctors and nurses in Yangon, Mandalay, and other cities, in opposition to the coup.²³ Beginning on February 22, "[b]ank tellers, cooks, grocery workers and hundreds of thousands of others" participated in a general strike in protest of the coup. Demonstrations and the measures that the military took in attempts to control them led to the closure of "[c]onvenience stores, markets and other essential businesses" in Yangon.²⁴ On March 8, businesses again closed throughout the country in response to 18 unions' call for a general strike.²⁵ The military warned that civil servants who continued to strike would be fired effective immediately.²⁶

Burma's health care system has come under particular pressure due to medical professionals' leading role in the CDM.²⁷ As government hospitals have come under military control, many doctors have refused to go to work there.²⁸ Police reportedly arrested at least 100 medical students in Yangon as they were preparing to march in a protest.²⁹ Primary care at some government hospitals has reportedly halted, although private clinics remain in operation, including for emergency care.³⁰

Burma's banking sector has been similarly disrupted by events since the coup, including strikes by employees at the private banks on which the country relies for interaction with the international

²¹ *Myanmar military supporters attack anti-coup protesters*, The Guardian, Feb. 25, 2021; *UK Sanctions Six Myanmar Coup Leaders for Serious Human Rights Abuses*, The Irrawaddy, Feb. 26, 2021.

²² *Three protesters killed as Myanmar workers go on strike*, Yahoo Finance/Agence-France Presse, Mar. 7, 2021.

²³ *Myanmar's Military Arrests Doctors for Joining and Supporting Civil Disobedience Movement*, The Irrawaddy, Feb. 12, 2021.

²⁴ *Myanmar grinds to a halt as hundreds of thousands strike against military coup*, Washington Post, Feb. 22, 2021.

²⁵ *Three protesters killed as Myanmar workers go on strike*, Yahoo Finance/Agence-France Presse, Mar. 7, 2021.

²⁶ *Three protesters killed as Myanmar workers go on strike*, Yahoo Finance/Agence-France Presse, Mar. 7, 2021.

²⁷ *Health Care Feels the Pinch as Myanmar Medical Workers Join Civil Disobedience Movement*, Radio Free Asia, Feb. 9, 2021; *Military Crackdown in Myanmar Escalates With Killing of Protesters*, New York Times, Feb. 28, 2021; *Myanmar's Military Arrests Doctors for Joining and Supporting Civil Disobedience Movement*, The Irrawaddy, Feb. 12, 2021.

²⁸ *Military Crackdown in Myanmar Escalates With Killing of Protesters*, New York Times, Feb. 28, 2021.

²⁹ *Military Crackdown in Myanmar Escalates With Killing of Protesters*, New York Times, Feb. 28, 2021.

³⁰ *Myanmar's Military Arrests Doctors for Joining and Supporting Civil Disobedience Movement*, The Irrawaddy, Feb. 12, 2021; *Health Care Feels the Pinch as Myanmar Medical Workers Join Civil Disobedience Movement*, Radio Free Asia, Feb. 9, 2021.

financial system.³¹ A March 1 estimate said that “tens of thousands” of such workers had ceased working a week following the coup.³² As of February 20, it was reported that many banks remained closed and others had reduced their business hours.³³ At locations where access to cash is available, customers must wait in long lines at ATMs and had only reduced access to funds.³⁴ Businesses also faced cash flow difficulties.³⁵

The military has curtailed the use of the internet on a nightly basis since February 15th, meaning that, during the blackouts from 1am – 9am, only 12-14 percent of usual internet connectivity is possible, mainly for certain users with virtual private networks (VPNs) and some users of Mytel, one of Burma’s major telecommunications services.³⁶ Daytime access to social media and certain other websites also continues to undergo increasing restrictions.³⁷ In Kachin State, most humanitarian organizations have had to limit in-person activities due, in part, to intermittent ability to maintain communications via telephone and internet.³⁸ In Rakhine and Chin States, according to U.N. human rights experts, the suspension of mobile internet services since early February has increased risks to civilians during a period of “intensifying conflict between the military and an armed group, the Arakan Army.”³⁹

The United Nations has also noted that coup-related obstacles to travel to and within Burma have hindered humanitarian access and relief operations. Administrative processes, such as “the review of travel authorizations, issuance of visas and entry permissions, or approval of the passenger list of relief flights” have been disrupted, as civil servants in the relevant government departments and ministries have participated in the CDM.⁴⁰

A very large number of persons in Burma rely on humanitarian assistance due in part to a decades-long history of armed conflict between the Burmese military and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicated that about 945,000 persons were targeted for such assistance in 2021.⁴¹ Access to such assistance remained

³¹ *Banks Closed in Myanmar as Anti-Coup Protests, Financial Chaos Continue*, Voice of American News, Feb. 20, 2020.

³² *‘Back to the Stone Age’: Striking bank workers bring an industry – and an economy – to its knees*, Frontier Myanmar, Mar. 1, 2021; *The shooting starts*, The Economist, Mar. 6, 2021.

³³ *Banks Closed in Myanmar as Anti-Coup Protests, Financial Chaos Continue*, Voice of American News, Feb. 20, 2020.

³⁴ *Banks Closed in Myanmar as Anti-Coup Protests, Financial Chaos Continue*, Voice of American News, Feb. 20, 2020.

³⁵ *Banks Closed in Myanmar as Anti-Coup Protests, Financial Chaos Continue*, Voice of American News, Feb. 20, 2020.

³⁶ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews*, U.N. Human Rights Council, Mar. 4, 2021.

³⁷ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews*, U.N. Human Rights Council, Mar. 4, 2021.

³⁸ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews*, U.N. Human Rights Council, Mar. 4, 2021.

³⁹ *UN rights experts ‘gravely’ concerned at spike in civilian casualties in north-west Myanmar following internet shutdown*, U.N. News, Feb. 18, 2020.

⁴⁰ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews*, U.N. Human Rights Council, Mar. 4, 2021.

⁴¹ *Relief programmes hit by ongoing crisis in Myanmar, UN humanitarian office says*, U.N. News, Feb. 26, 2021.

constrained, following the coup, “due to safety concerns and administrative procedures such as travel authorizations.”⁴² Among those in need of humanitarian assistance are over 330,000 people in Burma who remain internally displaced (IDPs), including in IDP camps and other locations where access is often sporadic because of security concerns and access restrictions.⁴³ These include:

- 126,000 IDPs in camps since 2012 violence in Rakhine State
- 101,000 people displaced by conflict in sites and host communities in Rakhine and Chin States
- 106,000 people in protracted displacement in Kachin and northern Shan States
- 5,300 people displaced by recent clashes in Kayah State and Bago Region
- 2,300 people newly displaced by February clashes in northern Shan State⁴⁴

The Burmese military’s history of committing grave atrocities in maintaining and expanding its control in the country has raised serious concerns about the possibility of escalating violence, new displacement, and ongoing and increased obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance to those already in need of it. Responding to previous movements against military rule and for the restoration of democratic government in Burma, in 1988 and 2007, the military committed massacres against participants, after initially hesitating for over a month before crushing the protests.⁴⁵ In mid-February 2021, the U.N. Special Rapporteur reported that the 33rd Light Infantry Division of the Burmese armed forces took part in the action against protesters in Mandalay, in which two people, including a teenage boy, were killed.⁴⁶ The 33rd Light Infantry Division was one of two divisions whose troops participated in brutal operations that drove more than 700,000 Rohingya out of Burma (and into neighboring Bangladesh) beginning in 2017.⁴⁷ The same division had also been deployed in earlier campaigns, including one in 2009 overseen by Min Aung Hlaing – commander-in-chief of the armed forces since 2011 and leader of the Burma’s military government following the February 1 coup – that resulted in some 37,000 people fleeing to China from eastern Burma.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The February 1, 2021 coup that ousted Burma’s civilian government has become increasingly violent in recent weeks, as the military has cracked down on civilians demonstrating against the coup. The number of arrests of protesters has also increased dramatically, including arrests in night-time raids facilitated by the suspension of detainees’ rights and internet blackouts effecting the vast majority of Burmese internet users. The coup has also caused severe economic destabilization, including in the health care system and banking sectors. In addition, the coup has caused disruption of the travel and access required for the provision of humanitarian relief to hundreds of thousands of people in Burma who rely on it, including to many who suffer from protracted internal displacement. Past practices of

⁴² *Relief programmes hit by ongoing crisis in Myanmar, UN humanitarian office says*, U.N. News, Feb. 26, 2021.

⁴³ *Myanmar: Humanitarian Update No. 4*, U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Feb. 25, 2021.

⁴⁴ *Myanmar: Humanitarian Update No. 4*, U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Feb. 25, 2021.

⁴⁵ *The shooting starts*, *The Economist*, Mar. 6, 2021.

⁴⁶ *Myanmar Army Unit Accused of Rohingya Atrocities Used in Deadly Crackdown: UN*, *The Irrawaddy*, Feb. 21, 2021.

⁴⁷ *Tip of the Spear: The shock troops who expelled the Rohingya from Myanmar*, *Reuters*, Jun. 28, 2018.

⁴⁸ *Tip of the Spear: The shock troops who expelled the Rohingya from Myanmar*, *Reuters*, Jun. 28, 2018.

Temporary Protected Status Considerations: Nepal

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the Burmese military raise fears that increased violence and further abuses may follow in the future, against opponents of the coup including, possibly, vulnerable ethnic minority groups.



Information on Muslims in Burma and Their Mistreatment by Nationalist Groups

January 2022

Provides information on Muslim populations in Burma, including ethnic groups to which they belong, social, economic, and legal status, forms of mistreatment that they have suffered from nationalist groups, and governmental responses to that mistreatment.

Muslims in Burma

According to Burma's most recent census (2014), 2.3 percent of Burma's population was Muslim, down from 3.9 percent in the next most recent census (1983). However, the 2014 percentage excluded an estimated 1.2 million Rohingya Muslims, living in Burma at that time, who the Burmese government did not (and does not) recognize as citizens.¹ According to the Turkish news outlet Anadolu Agency, if the Rohingya population had been included in the 2014 census, Burma's population might have been as much as 4.61 percent Muslim (up to 2.35 million persons).² Along the same lines, in its 2020 International Religious Freedom Report, the Department of State said:

Muslims (mostly Sunni) comprise approximately four percent of the population. The 2014 census excluded Rohingya from its count, but NGOs and the government estimated the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim Rohingya population at 1.1 million prior to October 2016. According to estimates from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other organizations, more than 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh beginning in August 2017, and an estimated 520,000 to 600,000 remain in Rakhine State. There are an estimated 130,000 Rohingya living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, according to Human Rights Watch.³

Unlike other Muslim populations in Burma, the Rohingya are not recognized as citizens of Burma. The Burmese government does not acknowledge the Rohingya as one of the ethnic groups that are indigenous to the country, even going to so far as to reject the term 'Rohingya' instead referring to them as 'Bengalis'.

The Rohingya trace their origins in the region to the fifteenth century, when thousands of Muslims came to the former Arakan Kingdom. Many others arrived during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Rakhine was governed by colonial rule as part of British India. Since independence in 1948, successive governments in Burma, renamed Myanmar in 1989, have refuted the Rohingya's historical claims and denied the group recognition as one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups. The Rohingya are considered illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, even though many trace their roots in Myanmar back centuries.

¹ *Census data shows Myanmar Muslim population has fallen*, Anadolu Agency (Turkey), Jul. 21, 2016.

² *Census data shows Myanmar Muslim population has fallen*, Anadolu Agency (Turkey), Jul. 21, 2016.

³ *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, U.S. Department of State, May 12, 2021.



Neither the central government nor Rakhine's dominant ethnic Buddhist group, known as the Rakhine, recognize the label "Rohingya," a self-identifying term that surfaced in the 1950s, which experts say provides the group with a collective political identity. Though the etymological root of the word is disputed, the most widely accepted theory is that Rohang derives from the word "Arakan" in the Rohingya dialect and ga or gya means "from." By identifying as Rohingya, the ethnic Muslim group asserts its ties to land that was once under the control of the Arakan Kingdom, according to Chris Lewa, director of the Arakan Project, a Thailand-based advocacy group.

The government refuses to grant the Rohingya citizenship, and as a result most of the group's members have no legal documentation, effectively making them stateless. Myanmar's 1948 citizenship law was already exclusionary, and the military junta, which seized power in 1962, introduced another law twenty years later that stripped the Rohingya of access to full citizenship. Until recently, the Rohingya had been able to register as temporary residents with identification cards, known as white cards, which the junta began issuing to many Muslims, both Rohingya and non-Rohingya, in the 1990s. The white cards conferred limited rights but were not recognized as proof of citizenship.

In 2014 the government held a UN-backed national census, its first in thirty years. The Muslim minority group was initially permitted to identify as Rohingya, but after Buddhist nationalists threatened to boycott the census, the government decided Rohingya could only register if they identified as Bengali instead.

Similarly, under pressure from Buddhist nationalists protesting the Rohingya's right to vote in a 2015 constitutional referendum, President Thein Sein canceled the temporary identity cards in February 2015, effectively revoking their newly gained right to vote. (White card holders were allowed to vote in Myanmar's 2008 constitutional referendum and 2010 general elections.) In the 2015 elections, which were widely hailed by international monitors as free and fair, no parliamentary candidate was of the Muslim faith.

In recent years, the government has forced Rohingya to start carrying national verification cards that effectively identify them as foreigners and do not grant them citizenship, according to a report by the advocacy group Fortify Rights. Myanmar officials have said the cards are an initial step toward citizenship, but critics argue that they deny Rohingya their identity and could make it easier for the government to further repress their rights.⁴

Additionally, according to the Department of State:

Rohingya remaining in Burma continued to face an environment of severe repression and restrictions on freedom of movement and access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods based on their ethnicity, religion, and citizenship status, according to the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).⁵

⁴ *Backgrounder: The Rohingya Crisis*, Council on Foreign Relations, Jan. 23, 2020.

⁵ *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, U.S. Department of State, May 12, 2021.



As indicated above, the Rohingya are only one of numerous Muslim groups in Burma. Regarding the general ethnography and distribution of Muslims (including Rohingya) in Burma, Minority Rights Group says the following:

Muslims in Burma, most of whom are Sunni, constitute at least 4 per cent of the country's entire population, with the largest concentration in the north of Rakhine State (also known as Arakan), especially around Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Akyab and Kyauktaw.

There are a number of distinct Muslim communities in Burma, not all of which share the same cultural or ethnic background. While the country's largest Muslim population resides in Rakhine State, it is actually made up of two distinct groups: those whose ancestors appear to be long established, going back hundreds and hundreds of years, and others whose ancestors arrived more recently during the British colonial period (from 1824 until 1948).

The majority of Muslims in Rakhine State refer to themselves as 'Rohingya': their language (Rohingya) is derived from the Bengali language and is similar to the Chittagonian dialect spoken in nearby Chittagong, in Bangladesh. Rohingya consider themselves to be indigenous to the region, whereas the Burmese government and Buddhist nationalists view them as descendants of people who arrived during the British colonial administration. A second group of Muslims in Rakhine State does not consider themselves as Rohingya, as they speak Rakhine which is closely related to the Burmese language, claim their ancestors have lived in the state for many centuries, and tend to share similar customs to the Rakhine Buddhists. They identify themselves as 'Arakanese Muslims', 'Burmese Muslims' or simply 'Muslims'.

There are additionally other distinct groups of Muslim minorities throughout much of the country, and in particular in most Burmese cities or towns. Most of these disparate, though at times quite substantial, groups are the descendants of 'migrants' from various parts of what is now India and Bangladesh, though they may have been established for generations in the country.

Many of these latter groups of Muslims speak Burmese and/or their language of origin. Some of them, however, have gravitated to some degree into the linguistic and cultural spheres of other minorities. In Karen State, for example, many Muslims have integrated into Karen communities, speak Karen, and sometimes refer to themselves as 'Black Karen'.⁶

While there is in actuality no reliable way to identify a Burmese Muslim, whether of South Asian origin or otherwise, by physical characteristics alone, there are certain identifiable prejudices in this regard. For example, according to the Burma-based Progressive Voices:

'Kalar' is a commonly-used term in Myanmar, often used in a derogatory way to denote people of darker skin color, often of South Asian descent. It is a historically charged and violent word, with Muslim minorities often described in a mocking or insulting way as 'Kalar.' However, it is also used against other religious minorities, such as Sikhs and Hindus. Its' effect is to 'other' those with darker skin, who do not fit into the ideal image of a Myanmar Buddhist, and especially a Burman Buddhist. During the waves of anti-Rohingya violence, whether committed

⁶ *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Muslims and Rohingya*, Minority Rights Group (last accessed: Jan. 12, 2022).



by the state security forces or by mobs of civilians, the term 'Kalar' was used to whip up hate and incite violence. It has, however, been in the lexicon of Myanmar language for many decades, as has its perception of being derogatory and insulting. It is not a new phenomenon.⁷

Mistreatment of Muslims Relating to Ma Ba Tha

Since at least 2011, an increase in the political importance of Buddhist nationalism has been widely reported to have coincided with increased violence against Burma's Muslim minority. As International Crisis Group described it:

Since the start of the political liberalisation in 2011, Myanmar has been troubled by an upsurge in extreme Buddhist nationalism, anti-Muslim hate speech and deadly communal violence, not only in Rakhine state but across the country. The most prominent nationalist organisation is the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (commonly referred to by its Burmese-language acronym, MaBaTha), made up of monks, nuns and laypeople. The government has focused considerable effort on curtailing this group and pushing the top Buddhist authority in Myanmar to ban it. Yet these efforts have been largely ineffective at weakening the appeal of nationalist narratives and organisations, and have probably even enhanced them.⁸

There have been reports of nationalist groups having organized boycotts of Muslim businesses and having attributed violence against Muslims to non-Muslims patronizing of Muslim-owned businesses.⁹ International Crisis Group explained this in terms of a perception that religious communities (including Muslims) were inclined to discriminate in favor of their own group in conducting business:

The economic networks that developed as a result of colonial-era immigration from South Asia have persisted in the form of a business class of traders with strong cross-border ties. There is a common perception that these communities only do business with each other, sharing access to markets and capital only within their own faith communities; the 969 boycott movement against Muslim businesses (see section III.A) was a direct response to this. [...]

The 969 movement was led by prominent monks including Ashin Wirathu and Ashin Wimala and was particularly vocal in its extremist rhetoric, making claims of a Muslim plot to take over. These dire warnings combined with a simple message to the faithful to "buy Buddhist" resonated strongly and were spread widely in the country through DVDs and 969 stickers.¹⁰

According to The Atlantic, 969 leader Ashin Wirathu summarized the rationale for the boycotts as follows:

"If you buy a good from a Muslim shop, your money just doesn't stop there," he said in a sermon in late February. He claims that "money will eventually be used against you to destroy your race and religion. That money will be used to get a Buddhist-Burmese woman and she will

⁷ *Challenging Entrenched Racism in Myanmar: Don't Call Me 'Kalar'*, Progressive Voices, Jun. 18, 2020.

⁸ *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*, International Crisis Group, Sep. 7, 2017.

⁹ See e.g., *Special Report: Myanmar gives official blessing to anti-Muslim monks*, Reuters, Jun. 26, 2013.

¹⁰ *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*, International Crisis Group, Sep. 7, 2017.



very soon be coerced or even forced to convert to Islam." According to Wirathu, "once [Muslims] become overly populous, they will overwhelm us and take over our country and make it an evil Islamic nation."¹¹

However, 969 leadership has denied involvement in or support for violence. Following anti-Muslim riots in the city of Meikhtila in 2013, according to an editorial in *The Irrawaddy* (a Burmese magazine):

In Pegu Division, the name 969 has been spray-painted on the walls of destroyed buildings, mosques and vehicles in ransacked townships. On some cars and taxis, 969 stickers can also be seen. Many people in the country believe members of the 969 movement sparked the anti-Muslim riots.

But U Wirathu, a leading monk of the movement, denied accusations that 969 was a religious extremist group. "We've just become scapegoats because no culprits were found after the Meikhtila riots," he said over the phone. "Within our circle, 969 is not violent."¹²

Subsequently, Ma Ba Tha was renamed the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation. As Department of State described the situation in its most recent International Religious Freedom Report (*emphasis added*):

Some leaders and members of the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation (formerly Ma Ba Tha) continued to issue pejorative statements against Muslims. Although the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SSMNC), an independent but government-supported body that oversees Buddhist affairs, issued orders that no group or individual be allowed to operate under the banner of Ma Ba Tha and declared it an "illegal organization," many local Ma Ba Tha branches continued to operate with that name. Other Ma Ba Tha leaders continued propagating anti-Muslim speech in sermons and through social media. According to Burma Monitor, an NGO focused on monitoring and analyzing hate speech, more than 100 Ma Ba Tha-affiliated candidates registered to run in the 2020 general elections, mostly from nationalist parties such as the Democratic Party of National Politics, the military-linked National Development Party, and the People's Pioneer Party. *While local and international experts said deep-seated prejudices led to abuses and discrimination against members of religious minority groups, some civil society groups worked to improve interreligious tolerance.* According to media reports, civil society activists spearheaded efforts to improve interreligious tolerance and respect for religious practices and to deepen interfaith dialogue. The interfaith "White Rose" campaign that formed after an anti-Muslim, Buddhist nationalist mob shut down temporary Ramadan prayer sites in Yangon in 2019 continued its efforts. Other religious and civil society leaders continued to organize intrafaith and interfaith events and developed mechanisms to monitor and counter hate speech. [...]

Despite a continuing order by the SSMNC that no group or individual operate under the banner of Ma Ba Tha, some branches of the group continued to use the name Ma Ba Tha, while others used the new name, Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation. Many of the group's leaders and members continued to make pejorative and hateful statements against Muslims in sermons and

¹¹ 969: *The Strange Numerological Basis for Burma's Religious Violence*, The Atlantic, Apr. 9, 2013.

¹² Kyaw Zwa Moe, *Root Out the Source of Meikhtila Unrest*, The Irrawaddy, Mar. 30, 2013.



through social media, including a July campaign in Mandalay that distributed stickers reading, “We don’t want the [National League for Democracy] to make Myanmar a *kalar* [often used as a pejorative word for Muslim] country.” [...] On November 2, Wirathu, a monk and chairperson of the Ma Ba Tha branch in Mandalay, surrendered to Yangon police on an arrest warrant issued in 2019 for criticism of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.¹³

Government Practices Regarding Protection of Muslims

The first major incidents of violence against Muslims in the last decade began in mid-2012:

In June and October 2012, clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine State left almost 200 people dead and around 140,000 displaced, the great majority of them Muslims. Communities remain essentially segregated to this day, and the humanitarian situation is dire.

In early 2013, the violence spread to central Myanmar. The worst incident occurred in the town of Meiktila, where a dispute at a shop led to anti-Muslim violence. The brutal killing of a Buddhist monk sharply escalated the situation, with two days of riots by a 1,000-strong mob resulting in widespread destruction of Muslim neighbourhoods, and leaving at least 44 people dead, including twenty students and several teachers massacred at an Islamic school.¹⁴

In 2013, following these events, International Crisis Group wrote:

The government and police have been widely criticised, domestically and internationally, for the poor response by security forces to the violence, which in many cases was clearly biased and woefully inadequate. In Rakhine State in 2012, the police reportedly did little to stem the violent attacks. Police in the area are overwhelmingly made up of Rakhine Buddhists who are at best unsympathetic to Muslim victims and at worst may have been complicit in the violence against them. The army, recruited nationally and rotated into the region, has been better at maintaining security – preventing or deterring attacks against Muslim villages, and guarding the last Muslim-majority neighbourhood in downtown Sittwe.

In Meiktila, witnesses spoke of police being apparently incapable of initially controlling the angry crowd at the gold shop, and then rapidly outnumbered. They appeared to lack the training, equipment, and rules of engagement or leadership that might have enabled them to contain the situation and restore order more quickly, potentially saving many lives.

One important factor influencing the nature of the response appears to have been the bungled police crackdown on demonstrators at the Letpadaung copper mine near Monywa in upper Myanmar on 29 November 2012. In this incident, the police were strongly criticised for their heavy-handed operation to clear demonstrators from the mine site, which included the improper use of military-issue smoke grenades containing an incendiary substance that caused many demonstrators, including monks, to suffer severe burns. The incident sparked protests across the country by monks and lay people, and the regional head of the police had to appear before senior monks to give a personal apology. President Thein Sein then set up an investigation

¹³ *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, U.S. Department of State, May 12, 2021 (*emphasis added*).

¹⁴ *The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar*, International Crisis Group, Oct. 1, 2013.



commission, headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, and sent a minister from his office to a ceremony in Mandalay to present a formal government apology to senior monks.

The Letpadaung incident, and the enormous criticism and scrutiny of the police that followed, seems to have had a significant impact on the willingness of the police to use force in the context of riot control. Police on the ground in Meiktila had no specialised competence in riot-control techniques, nor did they have non-lethal riot control equipment. A government official also identified a lack of vehicles as a constraint preventing police from mobilising quickly, especially to more remote areas. Heavily outnumbered and possibly lacking clear rules of engagement and direct orders from above, their actions were mainly limited to self-defence, negotiating with the mob (to limit its destruction to the gold shop or, later, to allow women and children to be escorted away from areas of violence), and videotaping crimes for later prosecution (some of these videos were subsequently leaked, see above).

This analysis is supported by the fact that incidents of communal violence in the wake of Meiktila, and particularly since Lashio, have generally been responded to more quickly and more assertively by police, with the result that mob violence has lasted hours not days, and casualties have been less. It therefore appears that the events in Meiktila may have been a wake-up call, and have pushed the police towards tougher responses that they had avoided in the wake of Letpadaung. It remains to be seen whether this positive trend will continue. A flashpoint has traditionally been the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha in October, which also coincides with a major Buddhist lunar holiday, Thadingyut.

Following the various incidents, police have arrested and prosecuted a significant number of people accused of violence and arson. There had been concerns that mainly Muslim suspects were being sentenced, despite the fact that most of those arrested were Buddhists; but subsequently greater numbers of Buddhists have been imprisoned. On 17 July 2013 a sting operation by police from Naypyitaw arrested six people in Toungup in Rakhine State in connection with the murder of the Muslim pilgrims in June 2012. In early July 2013, 25 Buddhists were found guilty of murder, assault and arson in connection with the riots in Meiktila, including two monks who were caught on camera engaging in violence. The authorities have also made a point of quickly prosecuting those responsible for the incidents that sparked the violence, presumably in an effort to ease communal tensions in those areas.¹⁵

However, in the subsequent lead-up to the November 2015 elections, the Burmese government passed four laws relating to inter-religious marriage and religious conversion that were widely regarded as discriminatory against Muslims and supportive of the demands of nationalist constituencies. The government portrayed these laws as designed to protect and promote Buddhism.¹⁶

In 2020, according to the Department of State:

Non-Buddhist minority groups, including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, said authorities restricted religious practice, denied freedom of movement to members of religious minority

¹⁵ *The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar*, International Crisis Group, Oct. 1, 2013.

¹⁶ See *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*, International Crisis Group, Sep. 7, 2017.



groups, closed places of worship, denied or failed to approve permits for religious buildings and repairs, and discriminated in employment and housing.¹⁷

While the government had encouraged the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SSMNC) to ban the use of the term Ma Ba Tha, as discussed above, there were also reports that the military-controlled Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) had provided support and funds to that organization over the years:

Although there were no public reports of military donations to Ma Ba Tha during the year, according to the weekly newsmagazine *Frontier*, the military and military-linked Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) had a history of patronizing and funding Ma Ba Tha. In October remarks to *Frontier*, a monk active in Ma Ba Tha stated, “So what if Ma Ba Tha was funded by the USDP? It’s a charity organization. Everyone was welcome to support Ma Ba Tha’s mission and it is not fair to criticize the giving of donations to a Buddhist organization.”¹⁸

Ma Ba Tha candidates ran in the 2020 elections (the results of which were annulled following the February 2021 military coup) on platforms including anti-Rohingya components. When a civilian leader criticized the military-controlled Home Affairs Ministry for not arresting nationalist leaders who reportedly incited violence, nationalist groups protested publicly:

According to *Burma Monitor*, more than 100 Ma Ba Tha-affiliated candidates ran in the 2020 general election from various – mostly nationalist – parties, such as the Democratic Party of National Politics, the military-linked National Development Party, and the People’s Pioneer Party. None of the candidates was elected to office. According to RFA, the parties’ campaign posters contained three banyan leaves – a symbol used by Burma’s Buddhist majority – and the slogan “No Rohingya.”

On February 9, hundreds of individuals, characterized as anti-Muslim ultranationalists by civil society and pro-tolerance activists, protested in Yangon as part of the newly formed and Ma Ba Tha-linked Myanmar Nationalist Organization, accusing the NLD-led government of failing to protect the country’s Buddhist majority, according to Reuters. Speakers at the rally protested against remarks made by Religious Affairs Minister Aung Ko, blaming him for criticizing the military-controlled Home Affairs Ministry for the government’s failure to arrest several nationalist figures for sedition and inciting violence. Protestors carried “No Rohingya” banners.¹⁹

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RAIO Research Unit within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

¹⁷ *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, U.S. Department of State, May 12, 2021.

¹⁸ *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, U.S. Department of State, May 12, 2021.

¹⁹ *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, U.S. Department of State, May 12, 2021.



Information on the Relationship of the Rohingya Language to Chittagonian and Rakhine

December 20, 2017

How similar or different is the language spoken by Rohingya in Burma's Rakhine State to/from the Chittagonian language spoken in Chittagong Division in eastern Bangladesh? To what extent do Rohingya in Burma and Bangladeshis in Chittagong speak each other's languages?

How similar are Rohingya and Rakhine (Arakanese)? To what extent are Rohingya and Bangladeshis from Chittagong respectively able to speak Rakhine?

Background

'Rohingya' is a term that refers to certain people living in or originating from western Burma's Rakhine (or Arakan) State.¹ Most Rohingya are Muslims.² Rohingya are the most prominent ethnic group in northern Rakhine State's Maungdaw District, which comprises the townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung, but also live in other parts of Rakhine State, notably in the city of Sittwe.³ Maungdaw District lies directly across the border from the Bangladeshi division of Chittagong.⁴ Rohingya in Burma have on several occasions over the past 40 years been displaced in large numbers, most recently and severely in August 2017. This displacement has been both internal and across the border to Bangladesh. In particular, Rohingya have fled Burma to the southern part of Chittagong Division, especially to near the city of Cox's Bazar, where refugee camps have hosted them in varying numbers for decades, notwithstanding multiple concerted attempts at repatriation.⁵

Chittagonian and Rohingya Languages

In ethnic terms, the Rohingya are closely related to Chittagonians in Bangladesh who speak Chittagonian dialects of Bengali as well as to some (but by no means all) other Burmese Muslims living outside of Rakhine state, including ones who have migrated to other countries, notably Malaysia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.⁶

Both Rohingya and Chittagonian are nonstandard dialects of Bengali (also known as Bangla), an Indo-European language closely related to Assamese, with a reported 40% lexical similarity to

¹ *Myanmar: Who are the Rohingya?*, Al-Jazeera, Nov. 30, 2017 (*hereinafter* 'Who are the Rohingya?').

² *Id.*

³ Syed S. Mahmood, et al, *The Rohingya people of Myanmar: health, human rights, and identity*, The Lancet, Volume 389, No. 10081, p1841-1850, 6 May 2017.

⁴ *Rohingya Crisis Explained in Maps*, Al-Jazeera, Oct. 28, 2017.

⁵ *Id.*; RAIO Research Unit, *Information on the Situation for Rohingya*, Mar. 28, 2001.

⁶ *Rohingya refugee crisis: It's not Muslims versus Buddhists, says writer Bertil Lintner*, Scroll.in, Dec. 10, 2017, <https://scroll.in/article/860053/rohingya-refugee-crisis-its-not-muslims-versus-buddhists-says-writer-bertil-lintner> (last visited Dec. 14, 2017); Who are the Rohingya?



Nepali.⁷ There are several dialects of Bengali spoken in Chittagong.⁸ Such dialects may be referred to as ‘Chatgaiyan Buli’, ‘Chatgaya’, or ‘Chittagonian Bengali’, as well as simply as ‘Chittagonian’.⁹ Speakers of standard Bengali may not understand Chittagonian dialects and vice versa.¹⁰ Some Chittagonian-speakers also speak standard Bengali, but others do not.¹¹ Dialects of Chittagonian also vary in different parts of Chittagong Division, forming “a continuum from north to south.”¹² They also differ depending on the religion of the speakers, with dialects spoken by Muslims showing more pronounced differences, than those spoken by the other religious minorities (primarily Hindus, but also some Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, etc.).¹³ Numerous ethno-linguistic groups in the region may, depending on their experiences, use Chittagonian as a second language. These include Bengalis, as well as both Rohingya and Rakhine (Arakanese) people.¹⁴

The Rohingya dialects, which can also be transliterated as ‘Rohinja’ or ‘Ruwaingya,’ are reportedly similar to the Chittigonian dialect spoken in southern Chittagong District.¹⁵ In 2012, there were estimated to be about 1.7 million Rohingya-speakers worldwide.¹⁶ Rohingya, like Chittagonian, comprises different dialects in different parts of Rakhine State, with little “contact between dialect groups living in different townships.”¹⁷ The river valleys in Rakhine State (Naf, Kaladan/Kitsapanadi, May-yu), in particular, each have Rohingya populations that speak different dialects.¹⁸ Whether or which of these dialects are mutually intelligible is not clear.¹⁹

⁷ Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Finnig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World – Bengali*, 2017.
⁸ Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Finnig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World – Chittagonian*, 2017. As of 2006, there were reportedly about 13 million speakers of Chittagonian.
⁹ *Id.* The Chittagonian dialects have been described as having a 43-64% lexical similarity with Bengali, a/k/a Bangla.
¹⁰ *Id.* Chittagonian speakers who are better educated or have access to television are more likely to understand standard Bengali, even if they are not comfortable speaking it.
¹¹ *Id.* Education and experience interacting with Bangla-speakers are the most relevant determinants of whether a Chittagonian-speaker will also be comfortable speaking standard Bengali.
¹² *Id.*
¹³ *Id.*
¹⁴ *Id.*
¹⁵ Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Finnig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World – Rohingya*, 2017 (*hereinafter* ‘Ethnologue – Rohingya’).
¹⁶ *Id.*
¹⁷ *Id.*
¹⁸ *Id.*
¹⁹ *Id.*



Rakhine (Arakanese) Language

Rakhine (or Arakanese) is a Tibeto-Burman language that is closely related to Burmese, to which it has a reported 91% lexical similarity.²⁰ Worldwide, there are an estimated 2 million speakers of Rakhine, about half of whom speak it as a second language.²¹ The vast majority (1.8 million) of Rakhine speakers are from Burma.²² In Burma, Rakhine is spoken not only in Rakhine State, but also in southern Chin State's Paletwa Township.²³ The Rakhine spoken in northern Rakhine State is slightly different from the standard dialect.²⁴ The Rakhine spoken in the southern townships of Rakhine State is markedly different from that spoken in northern Rakhine State and is more similar to Burmese.²⁵

Most Rohingya-speakers also use some Rakhine.²⁶ Rakhine is also spoken in southern Chittagong Division, along with Chittagonian.²⁷ The Marma, an Arakanese people who live in Bangladesh, likewise speak a dialect of Rakhine, between which and other varieties of Rakhine there is lexical similarity of over 85%.²⁸

Conclusions

Rohingya and Chittagonian are both dialects of Bengali. Rohingya is reportedly similar to the Chittagonian spoken in southern Chittagong Division. Yet, Chittagonian dialects spoken further north may not be intelligible to southern Chittagonians or Rohingya. Additionally, different dialects are spoken by Rohingya in different part of Rakhine State may or may not be mutually intelligible.

Rakhine (Arakanese) comes from a different family of languages than Rohingya and Chittagonian. But most Rohingya are able to speak and/or understand some Rakhine. In southern Chittagong Division, Rakhine is spoken along with Chittagonian. Marma people from Bangladesh also speak a language similar to Rakhine.

²⁰ Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Finnig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World – Rakhine*, 2017 (hereinafter 'Ethnologue – Rakhine'). Worldwide, there are an estimated 2 million speakers of Rakhine (the vast majority live in Burma), about half of whom speak it as a second language.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

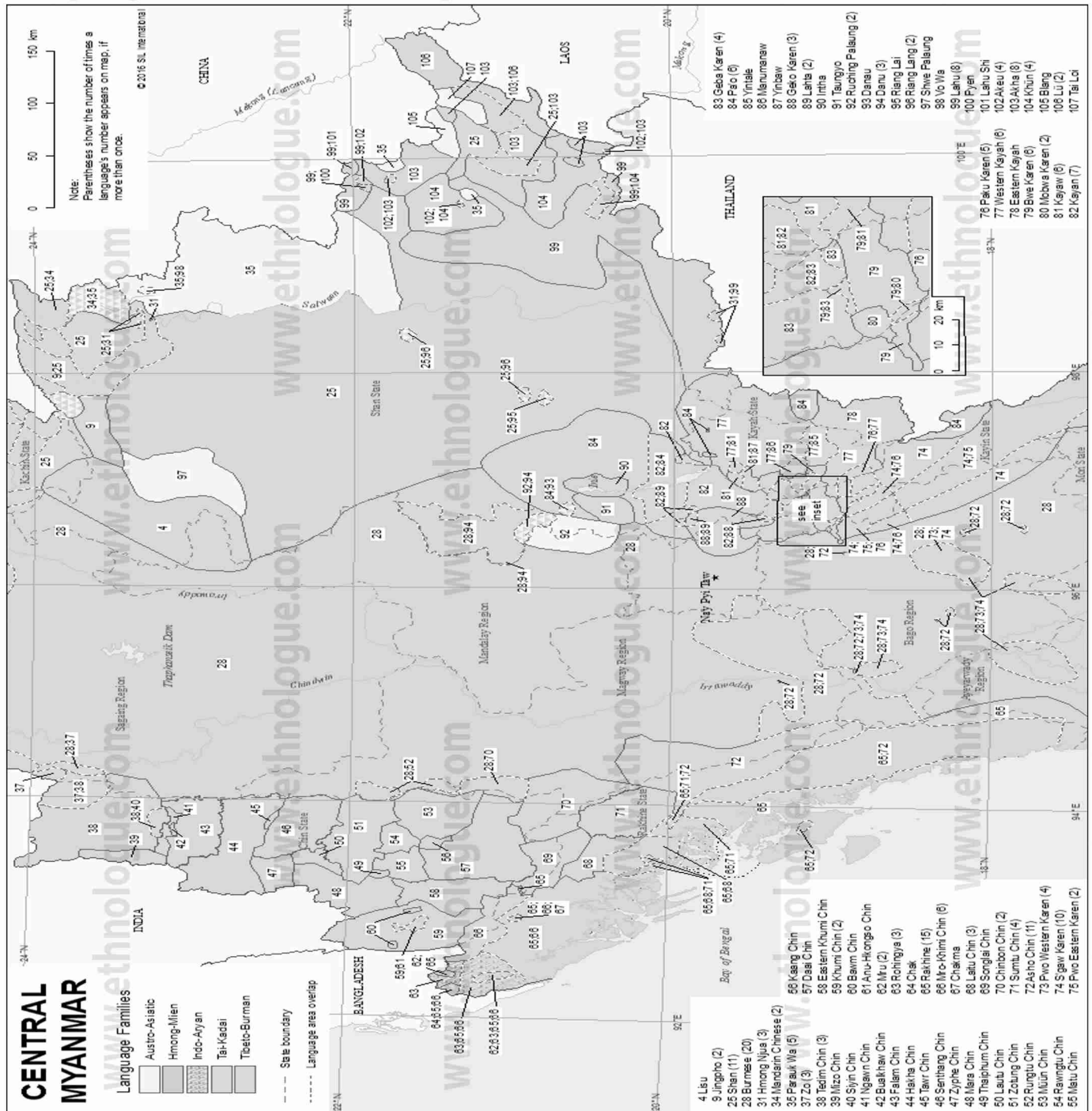
²⁶ Ethnologue – Rohingya. Some also speak a certain amount of Burmese. Educated Rohingya are likely to be literate in Burmese. Some Rakhine people also use Rohingya as a second language.

²⁷ See Appendix: Language Maps of the Bangladesh/Burma Border Area

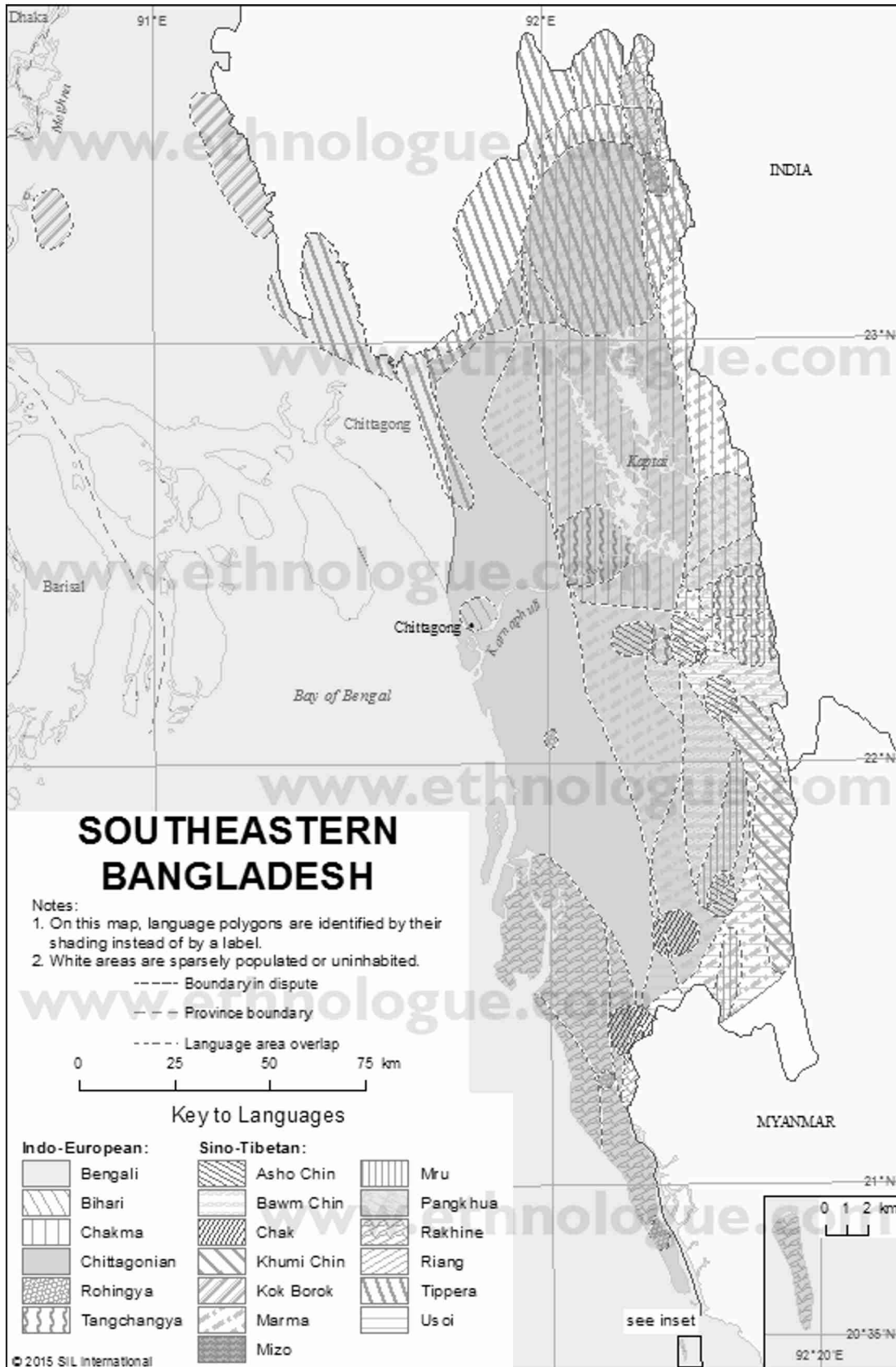
²⁸ Ethnologue – Rakhine.



Appendix: Language Maps of the Bangladesh/Burma Border Area²⁹



²⁹ Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Finning (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World – Language Maps*, 2017.



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Updates – February 2023

▪ Victims of Abuses in Refugee Camps

- 900 arrests related to 20 killings in camps ([The Diplomat 11/22](#), [The Irrawaddy 1/23](#)); An account, from 2017, of sufferings in the camps is part of a forthcoming book excerpted here ([Frontier Myanmar 2/23](#)); restrictions on the activities of camp residents have been increasing ([Human Rights Watch 4/22](#), [Crisis Group 8/22](#))

▪ Violent Actors in Refugee Camps

- International terrorist groups express intentions to recruit Rohingya, but don't seem to have had much success so far and assessments of their prospects differ ([The Diplomat 2/22](#)); Very recently Bangladeshi authorities made some arrests of alleged recruiters ([The Irrawaddy 1/23](#)) and, unrelated, arrests of manufactures of fake documents ([The Irrawaddy 2/23](#)); Scope of ARSA activities reduced on Burma – Bangladesh border and rivals appear in refugee camps ([The Diplomat 1/22](#))

▪ Situation and Events in Burma

- Burma government intends to again pursue repatriation to transit camps ([The Irrawaddy 2/23](#)); Burma government announces closures of IDP camps in Rakhine State ([Myanmar Now 1/23](#)); Fighting in Rakhine endangers Rohingya ([Anadolu Agency 11/22](#)); AA/UJA relations with Rohingya are important but mixed ([TNI 1/23](#))





News Summary: Eastern Burma

Date: 30 April 2012

Subject: Significant Events Relating to the Thai-Burma Border Area since August 2011

From: RAIO Research Unit, USCIS, Washington, D.C.

Background and Overview:

Burma's first nominally civilian government in approximately 40 years took office on April 1, 2011, following elections in November 2010, the integrity of which was criticized outside Burma.¹ Although subsequent political developments in Burma in 2011 have been evaluated as more promising than expected, civilian displacement due to tensions between the Burmese military and armed ethnic groups intensified during this period.² One major source of civilian displacement, at least 50,000 newly displaced persons, was the June 2011 resumption of hostilities in northern Burma's Kachin State, following the collapse of a 17-year ceasefire agreement between the Burmese government and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).³ Fighting and displacement occurred in Karen and other areas as well, as detailed below.

Meanwhile, higher-level negotiations between the ethnic rebel groups (apart from the Kachin) and the Burmese government did move forward.⁴ In February 2011, a United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) was formed to collectively represent the ethnic resistance groups in peace talks with the Burmese Military, including both those that had

¹ U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, BACKGROUND NOTE – BURMA, August 3, 2011.

² Sean Turnell, *Myanmar in 2011*, ASIAN SURVEY, January/February 2012.

³ INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT MONITORING CENTER, GLOBAL OVERVIEW 2011: PEOPLE INTERNALLY DISPLACED BY CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE – MYANMAR (April 11, 2012)[hereinafter GLOBAL OVERVIEW]; INT'L CRISIS GROUP, REFORM IN MYANMAR: ONE YEAR ON (April 11, 2012)(Kachin Independence Organization's (KIO) leadership met with military representatives in Ruili, near the Chinese border, in early March 2012, but armed clashes continue.); *Burma rebels blow up railroad section in north*, BBC INTERNATIONAL REPORTS (IRRAWADDY ONLINE), November 12, 2011.

⁴ INT'L CRISIS GROUP, *supra* note 3 (ceasefire agreements reached with eleven groups in one year: (1) United Wa State Army (UWSA), (2) National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA, "Mongla Group"), (3) Kloh Hto Baw ("Golden Drum" Group; ex-Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army Brigade 5), Shan State Army – South (SSA-South), Chin National Front (CNF), Karen National Union (KNU), Shan State Army – North (SSA – North), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council, Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)).

committed to ceasefire agreements at some point and those that had not.⁵ On the Thai-Burma border, the precise details of what agreements were and were not in place between the military and Karen groups -- such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, the Karen National Union, and the Karen National Liberation Army -- were sketchy and information from different sources sometimes conflicted. This is illustrated in the timeline below, which contains reporting from major regional and international sources. Dates provided are approximate.

Timeline:

August 2011 – Aung Sang Su Kyi sends open letters to President Thein Sein and to ethnic groups saying that she is ready to become involved and use her influence to help end conflict and build the nation.⁶

August 18, 2011 – According to [state media source] New Light of Myanmar, citing the Karen State Democracy and Development Party, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) transforms into a Border Guard Force of 12 battalions under the control of the military.⁷

August 31, 2011 – The Upper House of Parliament approves a “Peace Committee” to address conflict with ethnic groups.⁸

September 4, 2011 – One DKBA battalion, commanded by Saw Lerbwe (Saw Lah Pwe), is reported to still be engaged in fighting with Burmese military, according to a Karen National Union (KNU) spokesman.⁹

September 30, 2011 – KNU leaders terminate a meeting with government delegation in Mae Sot led by the Minister for Security and Border Affairs, calling instead for direct talks with the central government in Naypyidaw. Fighting between DKBA and military continues.¹⁰

October 2011 – Data from the Thai Burma Border Consortium shows that more people in southeastern Burma were displaced from their homes in the past year than in any year since 2002. Greater militarization of the area caused an estimated 112,000 to leave their

⁵ *Burma's Armed Ethnic Minorities Present Agenda for Successful Ceasefire*, INTER-PRESS SERVICE, March 10, 2012.

⁶ *Burmese ethnic groups urge Su Kyi to join panel for talks with government*, BBC INTERNATIONAL REPORTS (IRRAWADDY ONLINE), September 4, 2011.

⁷ *Karen militia are now border guards*, DEUTSCH-PRESS AGENTUR, September 4, 2011. *But see, Burma ethnic group calls for direct talks with government*, BBC INTERNATIONAL REPORTS (IRRAWADDY ONLINE), October 1, 2011 (saying that the DKBA declined the government's invitation to peace talks). *See also, IRRAWADDY, supra* note 3 (reporting that, by November 12, 2011 at least, part of the DKBA *had* signed a renewed ceasefire agreement). *See also, Burmese Karen group warns of abandoning cease-fire*, BBC INTERNATIONAL REPORTS (MIZZIMA NEWS AGENCY, NEW DELHI), February 23, 2012.

⁸ IRRAWADDY, *supra* note 6.

⁹ DEUTSCH-PRESS, *supra* note 7. *See also, IRRAWADDY, supra* note 7.

¹⁰ IRRAWADDY, *supra* note 7.

homes, with one of the three areas of “large displacement” being central Karen state, near Myawaddy. According to the report, the population of the nine refugee camps in western Thailand grew by nearly 3,000 in the year following August 2010.¹¹

October 2011 – As Burmese migrant workers in Bangkok flee the severe floods there, some of those who attempt to return to Burma approach through entry routes controlled by “government backed militia groups operat[ing] unofficial checkpoints” (including, reportedly, at least one DKBA brigade). In some cases, the migrant workers pay fees to return to their country.¹²

November 3, 2011 – The DKBA and a government delegation reportedly conclude a cease-fire agreement in Pa-an, at the home of the Karen State Chief Minister.¹³

November 11, 2011 – The KNU and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) appoint a group of seven representatives to meet with Burmese government officials for peace talks. Reports indicate that the Burmese army has reinforced strength in southern Burma where Karen rebels had been blocking a road project to link Kanchanaburi, Thailand with Tavoy in Burma.¹⁴

December 15, 2011 – A report by the Karen Human Rights Group based on interviews with 1,207 civilians in Karen, Mon, Karenni, and Tenasserim states/divisions finds that the elections did not lead to reductions in the harms associated with the two-decade old ethnic conflict. “[F]orced expropriation of labour, land and property from rural communities and the wide-scale and destructive extraction of natural resources” by the Burmese army continued on a large scale and torture was reported in four of the seven regions of eastern Burma where the survey was conducted.¹⁵

End 2011 – Estimated 450,000 people remain internally displaced in Burma.¹⁶

January 4, 2012 – National League for Democracy becomes a legally registered political party.¹⁷

Early January 2012 – The Burmese government announces that a ceasefire agreement was reached with the KNU.¹⁸

¹¹ *‘Militarization’ Blamed for Growing Displacement of People in Southeast*, WORLD NEWS CONNECTION (OSLO DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA), October 25, 2011.

¹² *Burmese Migrants Fleeing Floods in Thailand Arrested, Fined by Thai Police*, WORLD NEWS CONNECTION (OSLO DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA), October 26, 2011.

¹³ MIZZIMA, *supra* note 7.

¹⁴ *Burma rebel group appoints seven leading members for peace talks*, BBC INTERNATIONAL REPORTS (IRRAWADDY ONLINE), November 12, 2011.

¹⁵ *Burma: Study Finds ‘Egregious Human Rights Abuses’ Continuing After Elections*, WORLD NEWS CONNECTION (OSLO DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA), December 15, 2011.

¹⁶ GLOBAL OVERVIEW, *supra* note 3.

¹⁷ INT’L CRISIS GROUP, *supra* note 3.

¹⁸ *Still Defiant, Karen Rebels Deny Signing Cease-Fire With Myanmar*, NEW YORK TIMES, February 5, 2012.

January 26, 2012 – A shooting was reported in Thailand’s Umphang district, 10 miles south of the Nu Po refugee camp and south of Mae Sot. Ten to fifteen armed men thought to have crossed into Thailand from Burma opened fire on several homes in the village killing a man and woman and wounding a teenage girl. It was unknown whether the attackers were part of a militia.¹⁹

Early February 2012 – KNU general secretary denies that the KNU signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government in January.²⁰

Early February 2012 – Four Karen groups, including the DKBA and the KNU, hold informal talks discussing the development of an alliance between them for purposes of negotiation with the Burmese government.²¹

February 22, 2012 – More than 40 Karen women and children reportedly flee to Thailand’s Tak province due to fighting between the DKBA and a Border Guard Force (BGF) controlled by the Burmese military. Thai media reports that most of them were family of Burmese soldiers who had relatives living in Thailand.²² Burmese troops reportedly close access from the border to areas controlled by the DKBA.²³ The fighting was precipitated by the BGF’s seizure of some 30 weapons from the DKBA on February 19. A Burmese “information officer” reportedly told Indian media sources that the president of Burma ordered the BGF to return the weapons. The DKBA threatens to void the ceasefire agreement they had concluded with the military.²⁴

April 1, 2012 – Elections take place in which Aung San Su Kyi wins a seat in parliament.

April 7, 2012 – KNU leaders and Burmese President Thein Sein meet in the capital, agree on a ceasefire and (in the words of the Asia regional director of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue based in Singapore) come “close to reaching agreement on the modalities of a robust comprehensive peace process” in the first talks where “the central authorities have seriously engaged the Karen National Union (KNU) in substantive discussions.”²⁵

¹⁹ *Two Die, 1 Wounded as Thai Village Attacked by Armed Men 'from Burma'*, WORLD NEWS CONNECTION (OSLO DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA), January 26, 2012.

²⁰ NEW YORK TIMES, *supra* note 18.

²¹ *Karen Armies in 'Alliance' Talks For 'development and peace' in Region*, WORLD NEWS CONNECTION (OSLO DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA), February 7, 2012.

²² *Karen villagers flee clash into Thailand*, THAI NEWS SERVICE, February 22, 2012.

²³ *Border situation tense as peace talks set for next month*, THAI NEWS SERVICE, February 23, 2012.

²⁴ MIZZIMA, *supra* note 7.

²⁵ Michael Vatikiotis, *Talks bear fruit in protracted Southeast Asia conflicts*, BANGKOK POST, April 12, 2012; *See also*, INT’L CRISIS GROUP, *supra* note 3.