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Chin Human Rights Organization

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A delegation of women from Burma including CHRO Researcher and Advocate Rosalinn Zahau, second from right, in the UK [Photo (above): BCUK] & Refugee women from Burma demonstrating in Delhi, India in March 2014 [Photo (below): CHRO]



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Arbitrary Taxation & Extortion

Govt admin head demands money to release detainee in Matupi

04 March 2014 -

Kyaw Min Htwe, Matupi Township General Administration Head, demanded a ransom of 300,000 Kyats and promised that in return he would release Ni Uk, a villager of Cawngthia, who has been kept in police custody since early last month.

Uk's relatives told the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) that Htwe said he had the power to free him but added that he needed the money to deal with the case.

"He said Ni Uk can be released within 24 hours once the payment is made, and he cannot be released without money. So, we managed to get the amount, went to his [Htwe] house around 8pm and gave it to him," added the relatives.

Htwe threatened them during their conversation that anyone opposing his power and order would be put in jail according to the laws, they added.

"That was the main reason why we had to make sure the money was ready so that Uk could be freed. But he [Htwe] has not done anything to free our brother."

When asked about the matter later, Htwe just said that he would try his best to tell the court not to give him a prison sentence.

Uk is still detained in the Matupi Police Station after being charged with disobeying the instructions given by the Village General Administration Head of Cawngthia in relation to rural management matters.

The relatives of Ni Uk are preparing to lodge an official complaint by letter to the Chief Minister of the government of Chin State to take necessary action against Kyaw Min Htwe. #

Complaint against senior govt staff over corruption

19 March 2014 - Kyaw Min Htwe, Head of the Matupi Township General Administration, is accused of milking money from development funds and threatening staff members.

An administrative officer and a government employee, both of whom asked not to be named, reported to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) on his corruption, extortion and dishonest behaviour towards civil servants.

They said that he had siphoned off 4,500,000 kyats out of a total 2013-14 budget of 6,500,000 provided by the State government in May last year for construction of a Matupi-Amsoi road.

"He spent only 1,900,000 Kyats for fuel and salaries of machine drivers. The account for the rest of the expenses are nowhere to be found," they added.

Recently, Peng Lian, Amsoi Village General Administrator, was forced to get a written report on the completion of an unfinished over-2-mile road between Matupi and Paletwa towns by the first week of last

month, with a threat of holding his salary.

Htwe is also accused of putting discriminatory measures into his dealing with a government loan budget of 120,000,000 kyats, with 2.5 percent interest for 200,000 kyats per civil servant.

"It is not fair that he loans 500,000 and 5,000,000 kyats to the wife of Deputy Head of the Matupi Town General Administration Nyi Nyi Lwin, and USDP Chairman of Matupi Township respectively, both with no interest charges while others are asked to pay different interest rates of 1.5 or 2.5 percent," said the government employee.

It is also alleged that Htwe had diverted 5,000,000 kyats donated during his November visit by Thura Shwe Mann for Matupi Township development after claiming that it was originally meant for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

"Community Chairman Pu Cang Kom received the donation and handed it over to Kyaw Min Htwe. And a USDP party accountant confirmed that there was no receipt of incoming money as such," they added.

On another occasion in July last year, Htwe had cut 30,000 kyats from the salary of each of 25 village

clerks in Matupi Township on his own initiative, with no reasons given.

The clerks were quoted as saying: "Later, he ordered us to sign a document saying that it was the money they donated for office general expenses as the District General Administration Office were conducting an investigation in September last year."

Htwe's wife Khin Thet Mon Kyaw, a lower clerk at the Matupi Township General Administration Office, is said to have continued to draw her monthly salary although she has not come to the office following the end of her maternal leave in December last year.

It is claimed that she is getting someone else in the office to sign in and out on her behalf to prove that her work attendance is regular.#

Township police threatens, extorts money from loggers

Matupi Police Chief Myo Min Oo threatened three villagers in Mindat Township with gun and demanded money from them for getting timbers in the local area to construct a building.

On 5 March, Police Chief Myo Min Oo and two policemen, three Matupi Township Admin officers from Ngango village, and Moe Kyaw from the Forest Administration Office went to the village of the three loggers, who were then chained.

A Mindat local reported to the Chin Human Rights Organization that he [police chief] allegedly pointed his pistol at their mouths and threatened to shoot them if they didn't give him money.

The police chief subsequently said that he would burn their dead bodies with petrol if they didn't pay the amount of 800,000 kyats. He slapped their faces twice each and also hurt them in their noses, ears and faces by using typewriter.

One of the victims, ZNN (name changed for security reasons) said: "We did not have enough money. But we eventually managed to get 600,000 kyats."

After the amount was paid, Myo Min Oo tried to appease the villagers by saying the incident had taken place only because of the village administrator's fault.

"He persuaded us and requested us to believe him that he did this only at the request of the village administrator. He said that the village administrator wanted him to make sure that people in the village didn't dare to get timber planks from the area in the future, and that he was not doing it at his own wish," said ZNN's relative.

In addition, the police chief and his men took six bottles of petrol and shot four birds in the village for their meal without taking permission from the locals, according to the relative.#

...he [police chief] allegedly pointed his pistol at their mouths and threatened to shoot them if they didn't give him money.

Freedom of Religion

Yesagyo Chin pastor's court date set after repeated postponement

14 March 2014 -

Rev. Zun Hlei Sum, a Chin Christian pastor accused of constructing a religious building in Yesagyo town, said that the court has confirmed the date for him to stand trial as 21 March.

He told the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) that he was informed last Tuesday of the court date after previous completely unexplained postponements.

Head of the Yesagyo Township Administration Office Khaing Htun, who took the Chin pastor to court, will next week bring two witnesses, the head of the town municipal administration office and the ward administrator of the area where Sum lives, to give evidence.

The Chin pastor said that he was not happy about the postponements and how the court had dealt with the situation, and that he would fight against the allegations as he hadn't violated any laws.

Sum said that Khaing Htun and he turned up at court last Tuesday and had a brief conversation, and that the Yesagyo Township Court told them about the next court date.

He added that it was the fourth time the date had been postponed during February and March this year without any reasons given and that he came to court only to learn that it had been pushed back.

"When I arrived at court, I had to wait for hours just to get informed that the date had been postponed. Sometimes, the reason given was that the plaintiff was busy and hence didn't turn up," added Sum.

"Last week, I got to court at 10am and Khaing Htun was not there. The judge had someone call for him but he didn't come. After three hours, the judge told me to come back on 11 March."

Sum received the first official letter of this year, signed by Aung Htway, a judge of the Yesagyo Township Court, on 13 February to appear in court on 17 February.

According to the official documents of October 2012, relevant authorities including health and fire brigade departments had granted the Chin pastor permission to construct a building in his compound.

Rev. Zun Hlei Sum has been ordered to stop construction following an accusation made by Buddhist monks and Yesagyo residents on the basis that he would probably use his building upon completion for religious purposes.

The case continues.#

Chin Chief Minister urged to move pagoda construction site

22 March 2014 - Over 130 residents in Sami town, Paletwa Township, Chin State are reiterating their call on the Chin government to change the location of a Buddhist pagoda being built in the centre of a reserved area.

They sent another appeal letter to Chief Minister Hung Ngai last Wednesday, urging him to stop the construction in an area planned for

an extension of No. 2 Ward.

A local leader reported to the Chin Human Rights Organization that they are not opposed to building a Buddhist pagoda, highlighting: "We are only requesting the authorities to change the construction site."

He also said that the initial plan agreed by community leaders, town-elders and government officials was to build houses and government departments in the new ward.

He added that they were not informed of any preparation for the

pagoda construction, which seems to have begun late December last year.

The leaders had met with Han Win Aung, Paletwa Township General Administration Head, regarding the issue.

"He [Han Win Aung] blandly told us that there is no problem with the current location," said the leader.

The second letter was sent to the Chief Minister as he hadn't made any response to the first sent on 10 February 2014.#

Magwe authorities behind court case against Yesagyo Chin pastor

26 March 2014 - Rev. Zun Hlei Sum has been sued under the official instruction of the Magwe Region government, the Yesagyo Township Court heard yesterday.

Zaw Naing Tun, a town municipal administration officer who testified as one of the four witnesses, told the court that the Magwe Region authorities have issued an order to them to take the Chin Christian pastor to court.

He said that the authorities took this legal action because Buddhist monks and residents in Yesagyo town had submitted a signed petition against Sum, who is accused of constructing a religious building.

The Chin pastor said to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) today: "When I said I wanted to see the official document issued by the Magwe au-

thorities, I was told that they didn't have it with them. So, they were not able to present it to me."

He indicated that the Yesagyo town authorities were initially the mastermind behind the petition signed by 57 Buddhists and 487 residents.

"I learned from confirmed sources that the first trigger for this action was the Yesagyo authorities themselves, who motivated the petitioners," added the Chin pastor.

Zaw Naing Tun told Rev. Zum Hlei Sum that the reason why permission to continue his construction was refused was owing to local disapproval as shown in the petition letter.

Today, Soe Tun, a town municipal administration committee member, will testify as the last of the witnesses; the three others, Zaw Naing Tun; Hla Tun, a ward administrator; and Phu Win, Chairman of the town municipal administration office, all testified yesterday.#

Other Human Rights Violation

Chin farmers face difficulties after land confiscation

18 March 2014 - Chin subsistence farmers in Phaneng village, Matupi Township, Chin State are in a difficult situation after their farmland was confiscated by authorities late last year.

One of the local land proprietors has reported to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) that the authorities forcibly took away 2.8 acres of land belonging to five subsistence farmers for construction of a new Matupi-Bungtla tarred road.

He said: "We get enough rice for our family from this field each year. Now that our land is destroyed, we are in a situation

where we have to borrow rice from others."

Acres of farmland confiscated for the Matupi-Bungtla road and owners are:

1. Zal Theng - 0.50 acre
2. Al Ding - 1.00 acre
3. Al Thang - 0.30 acre
4. Cang Zit - 1.00 acre

The construction project, contracted by Naing Min Construction Company, is conducted upon the direction of the Progress of Border Areas and National Races Department under the Ministry of Border Affairs.

Earlier this year, subsistence farmers in Paletwa Township had had their rice paddies destroyed to make way for the new Paletwa-Matupi road.#

"We get enough rice for our family from this field each year. Now that our land is destroyed, we are in a situation where we have to borrow rice from others."

- A farmer

Humanitarian & Development Situation

CNF to provide rice in poppy-eradicated areas in Chin State

05 March 2014 -

The Chin National Front (CNF) says that it will provide bags of rice to villagers affected by a drug eradication activity conducted in Tonzang Township and Cikha Sub-township in Chin State.

It said that the rice contribution would be made this month with the assistance of the Nippon Foundation, a Japanese government programme that has been supporting the ethnic peace process through development aid.

The government claimed that it had destroyed more

than 600 acres of opium poppy field over the past few months in Burma's least developed State, where the cultivation has been reported to be increasing.

According to media reports, the recent operations have left many Chin families in a difficult situation after destruction of the poppy plantations which had served as their main source of income.

Burma Army battalions stationed in northern parts of Chin State and nearby areas in Sagaing Region have been reported active in drug-related trade in collaboration with the Meitei rebel armed groups from Manipur State in India.

The 2012 peace agreements between the Union Peace-Making Work Committee and the CNF include eradication of opium poppy cultivation in Chin State.#

Food shortages hit villages in Chin State

10 March 2014 - Dozens of villages in Thantlang, Matupi and Paletwa townships are facing renewed food shortages following bad weather conditions and low yields of harvest.

About 30 villages along the India-Burma border are now in a difficult situation as they are running out of rice, according to local media reports.

A subsistence farmer in Tisi, Matupi township said in the *Khonumthung* news that only about 2 out of 70 households in his village have got enough food.

The village head of La-aw in Thantlang township told the Chinland Post that his 320 villagers, domiciled in 50 households, are suffering from food and water scarcity, adding: "Some of them [the villagers] are in despair and are even thinking about abandon-

ing the village."

Chin subsistence farmers consider unusual weather to be the factor affecting their crops and causing low yields from the harvest.

The La-aw village head also said: "We don't have any educated person in our village and don't know how to get assistance from the State government or NGOs working in Chin State."

A Christian pastor based in Pathiantlang village, Paletwa Township said that the UNDP provided rice in Paletwa areas but the cost of transportation per bag [about 50 kg] up to their village is over 30,000 Kyats, adding: "They cannot afford it and it is not easy to get rice from the Indian side either."

Late last year, local NGOs in Chin State in collaboration with Hakha-based UNDP started assisting the construction of food storage for 30 villages in the three Chin townships.#

"We don't have any educated person in our village and don't know how to get assistance from the State government or NGOs working in Chin State."

- La-aw village head

Airport construction site surveyed near Hakha

12 March 2014 - The authorities have carried out a survey on a site on the outskirts of Hakha town, Chin State for construction of a domestic airport.

A government employee in Hakha said that the survey was conducted yesterday and that it was the second time the place had been studied for the new project.

Officials from the Department of Civil Aviation under the Ministry of Transport arrived in the Chin capital last weekend, according to the *Chinland Post*.

The Hakha employee added that members of different government departments and community leaders were also invited and took part in the survey.

The site has been identified as a sloping hill near Rihkuangtlang cemetery although detailed information is still unavailable.

Late last month, U Tin Naing Tun, Director General of the Department of Civil Aviation, and government officials including Hung Ngai, Chief Minister of the Chin State government, visited Mount Surbung, another airport site surveyed near Falam town.

Chin State, Burma's least developed region and sharing international borders with Bangladesh and India, remains the only state in the country that does not have a single airport.

Burma has a network of 41 airports including three international airports, according to a 2013 report by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. #



CB Bank in Hakha, Chin State (Photo: CHRO)

Chinland Post that he hoped that the opening ceremony of the bank would be held before the end of April although he said he hadn't been informed of the exact date.

"The building itself is completed and what needs to be done now is the installation of internet and network services. So, I hope it will be finished soon," added the manager.

The manager indicated that the bank might open soon after the Burmese New Year Water Festival, a public holiday that falls on 13-16 April.

He also said that the Western Union service would function once the bank started providing financial services to the Chin public.

Western Union to open in Chin State's Hakha

27 March 2014 - The first Western Union service in Chin State will be available for sending and receiving money soon as the Co-operative Bank Ltd., better known across the country as CB Bank, is scheduled to open next month.

Mr. Lalramchuana, CB Bank manager, said in the

Detailed information about the rates of money exchange if remittance comes from abroad, the service charges and how long the process will take is not available yet.

The Western Union started its services in Burma early last year, functioning with seven domestic banks, Kanbawza, Co-operative, First Private, Myanmar Apex, Myanmar Livestock and Fisheries Development, Myanmar Oriental and United Amara, according to sources. #

Telenor surveys Chin State for cell towers

18 March 2014 - Telenor, Norway's telecommunications company, is conducting a survey for mobile phone tower sites in Chin State.

A member of the survey team said in the Hakha Post that they had carried out a feasibility study on locations in the southern parts of Burma's least developed region.

The team member also said that the company planned to plant a number of cell towers across the country's mountainous western state.

"There will be six towers in the whole of Hakha Township. We have managed to identify one out of three locations planned in Hakha town alone, and still need to find another three sites in Hakha Township,"

added the member.

In its presentation last month, Telenor said that it intends to provide coverage to 90 percent of the population of Burma within five years.

However, the challenges it highlighted include the need for infrastructure development across the country, saying that 75 percent of population has no electricity and that there is poor connectivity outside the major 20 cities.

It also announced its signing of an agreement with Burma's government for a 15-year telecommunications licence.

In June last year, Burma announced that Qatar's Ooredoo and Norway's Telenor had won licences to develop networks in Burma, a country isolated from the outside world before the installation of the new quasi-civilian government in March 2011.#

Thantlang Township, Chin State (Photo: CHRO)



Resource Institute, added that 67 percent of land in the country's least developed state is unusable for agricultural purposes according to the research survey.

One of the main reasons cited is the region's steep and rugged mountainous geography.

At his meeting with Chin refugee communities in the Indian city last week, he described poverty as one of the most serious challenges facing Chin people during Burma's current political transition

Over 60 percent of land unusable for agriculture in Chin State

20 March 2014 - Chin researcher Salai Vum Za Piang, aka Salai PP, highlighted during his presentation in Delhi, India that the vast majority of land in Chin State is unsuitable for cultivation.

The Chin member of Burma's delegates travelling to the neighbouring country to participate in environmental training said that only about 33 percent can be used for agriculture-based business in Burma's western state.

Salai PP, a researcher at the Myanmar Development

period.

He mentioned that Chin State has a migration issue triggered by poverty, adding: "It [poverty] has pushed us to go away from our native land to other countries."

In his attempts to find possible solutions to problems facing people in Chin State, Salai PP put stress on the need for building and strengthening good community-based capacity.

During the Chin national conference held in Hakha in November last year, Salai PP had played an active part as one of the facilitators for sessions discussing issues related to economic development and infrastructure.#

Commodity prices increase as govt to give pay rise

23 April 2014 - A surge in prices of consumer goods has hit markets in Chin State following the announcement of pay increase to civil servants by the government of Burma since February this year.

Prices of basic commodities including rice have gone up to more than 25 percent although the pay rise of 20,000 Kyats to government employees excluding ministers will start from the end of this month.

The cost of a bag (about 50 kg) of 'Shwe Toe' rice, one of the cheapest, has increased from 18,000 to 25,000 while 'Paw San Hmwe' of a better quality now costs 43,000, having jumped from 35,000.

A shop-owner in Hakha told the *Chinland Guardian*: "As soon as we heard about the news, the prices started going up even before the actual pay rise. Locals who are not in the civil service suffer most."

Salai Lian, a local construction worker, said that their wages remained the same, adding: "Our daily living costs are increasing and we are in a difficult situation."

Government employees from the rank of an office



A market in Hakha, Chin State (Photo: CG)

assistant up to a gazetted officer will receive 20,000 Kyats each on top of their monthly salary in the April payment.

"Previously, an office assistant got a salary of 30,000 Kyats and will now get 50,000. A gazetted officer will receive 150,000 Kyats after the pay rise," said a Hakha civil servant.

Each government employee in Chin State, the country's least developed region, has since about two years ago been provided with a twofold monthly salary as a form of additional financial assistance.

According to local shop-owners, prices are likely to continue on the rise over the next few months.#

Chin State's Mt. Victoria nominated for World Heritage status

06 March 2014 - Mount Victoria in Chin State has been recommended as one of the two priority candidates to be nominated for UNESCO's World Heritage List.

The highest mountain in Burma's western state, together with the Indawgyi Lake Wildlife Sanctuary in Kachin State, was chosen during the National Consultation Meeting organized by the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry and UNESCO in Nay Pyi Taw late last month.

In a statement released yesterday, Dr Nyi Nyi Kyaw, Director-General of the Forestry Department, said that Burma has several sites with high potential but none of them has received World Heritage status, add-

ing: "The designation of World Heritage would provide opportunities for practicing the effective protection and management of these irreplaceable sites."

Standing at the height of 3,053 metres (10,016 ft) above sea level, the third highest mountain in Burma was named the 32nd ASEAN Heritage Park, and has been protected as one of the national parks in the country.

Dr Tim Curtis, Chief of UNESCO Bangkok's Culture Unit, said: "World Heritage provides a framework for the highest level of international commitment to the protection of sites which are considered of Outstanding Universal Value. Myanmar is now taking an important step forward in protecting its natural heritage in accordance with World Heritage standards."

Mount Victoria, an 'unspoiled' area

and a natural habitat for several endemic bird species and home to over 800 plant species, is renowned for its extreme elevation gradient and great beauty, the statement added.

Flanked by the two townships of Mindat and Kanpetlet in southern Chin State, Mt. Victoria is locally called by names with some slight variations in spelling including Khonumsung and Khonumtung, both describing the same meaning as a great mountain.

Local communities have expressed disapproval over the use of 'Nat-Ma-Taung', a distorted translation into Burmese, saying that its original name should be used.

The two sites, selected from among the seven recently proposed for Burma's World Heritage Tentative List, will now be put forward for future World Heritage listing.#

Event & Protest

Chin media agencies to attend ethnic media conference in Taunggyi

03 March 2014 -

Representatives of Chin media agencies based both inside and outside of Chin State are to join the second ethnic media conference to be held in Taunggyi, Shan State on 4-6 March.

Leading members of at least seven news groups from Hakha, Falam, Tahan and Rangoon will attend the Taunggyi event, the theme being 'Building Networks Among Ethnic Media in Myanmar'.

When asked about the purpose of their participation, Salai Lian, of the Chinland Post, said: "This conference will bring together people from different ethnic groups, especially with media backgrounds, and we

would also like to strengthen our communication and network for improving the quality and dissemination of news."

"We believe that this time people will come up with something more collective and stronger as a group. We would also like to request the next media event to be held in Chin State in a bid to raise more awareness about the importance of news both to the State government and the people," he added.

The event is organized jointly by Yoma Ahlinn, Shan Than Daw Sint journal, and the Burma News International (BNI), an umbrella network of 11 independent media groups based in Burma and neighboring countries.

In April, last year, about 150 people including representatives from 34 ethnic and mainstream media groups, attended the first ethnic media conference held in Mon State.#

Situation of Refugees

Refugee women demonstrating in Delhi (Photo: CHRO)



Burmese refugee women demand protection in India

08 March 2014 - More than 600 Burmese refugees staged a rally in Delhi today, asking equal rights and safety for them in India as they commemorated International Women's Day.

Burmese Refugee Women in Delhi (BRWD), which organized the protest event, said that it has documented more than 200 cases of violence against women and children in Delhi alone over the past three years.

It added that more than 100 of the cases are related to sexual violence, adding: "This is an ongoing problem with no proper protection mechanism available for refugees in India."

Holding placards and banners, they chanted slogans that read 'We Need Protection and Justice. Stop Sexual Harassment and Discrimination', highlighting the insecure situation facing refugees from Burma in the Indian city.

Ms. Akhu, a BRWD leader, said: "We, Burmese women, are neglected and badly treated when it comes to health and security issues. Therefore, we urge the Indian government and the UNHCR to provide a better and safer service for us in our daily crisis."

They called for an immediate stop to all forms of violence and discrimination against women, and on the Indian authority and the international community to step up their efforts in improving conditions for refugees in India.

It is estimated that there are around 8,000 refugees from Burma, the majority being Chin, currently stranded in Delhi.#

Other News

New Burma UN HRs envoy appointed

06 March 2014 -

Ms. Yanghee Lee, 58, from the Republic of Korea, is appointed to replace Tomas Ojea Quintana, the outgoing UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma.

The announcement came this week as Baudelaire Ndong Ella, President of the UN Human Rights Council, made a decision although the new appointment is yet to be officially confirmed tomorrow.

She will assume her new position as the UN Human Rights envoy to Burma if there is no objection by the close of business in Geneva, Switzerland this Friday.

Ms. Lee, who completed her Ph.D in Early Childhood in USA, has served as Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child since May 2007.

Despite positive changes happening in the country, Burma is still witnessing gross ongoing human rights violations and abuses, especially in ethnic areas.

In his final statement last month, Mr. Quintana also indicated that Burma still needs to address a number of issues that 'could jeopardize the entire reform process'.#



Workshop on the protection of women and children for the CNF organized by Geneva Call & AIPP (Photo: CNF)

CNF vows to protect children and combat sexual violence

20 March 2014 - The Chin National Front (CNF), together with its armed wing the Chin National Army (CNA), signed Geneva Call's documents in Geneva, Switzerland yesterday, committing to the 'highest international norms in terms of child protection and prohibition of sexual violence'.

In inking two Deeds of Commitment, the CNF formally agrees not to recruit or use children under the age of 18 in hostilities and puts every effort into protecting them from the effects of conflict.

According to a statement released by Geneva Call, the CNF also reaffirms its determination to strictly prohibit all forms of sexual violence in a region where cases of sexual violence have often been reported.

Paul Sitha, CNF Secretary-I, said: "Our signing of these two Deeds of Commitment clearly indicates the priority that we give to seeking to reduce the risk of harm to those who are not involved in the conflict. As with anti-personnel mines, we will actively take steps to ensure that the terms of the

two new instruments are complied with."

Geneva Call, a non-governmental organization that engages armed non-State actors towards respect of international humanitarian norms, said that the recent signing by the CNF came after years of engagement, training and workshop in the past.

In 2006, the Chin rebel group, which has been fighting for self-determination, democracy and federalism, had signed the Deed of Commitment banning anti-personnel mines.

The CNF reached ceasefire agreements with the central government of Burma in 2012.#

Time-bomb explodes in Tedim, no casualties reported

28 March 2014 - An explosive device, believed to be a time-bomb, went off in front of the Chin National Front liaison office in Tedim town, Chin State yesterday.

The blast took place around 8:30pm last night, causing some damage to the walls and windows of the CNF office but no injuries and casualties have been reported.

A Tedim resident told the Chinland Post that some

windows were broken and walls affected but no one was killed or hurt.

Information as to who is responsible and the reason behind the explosion remains unknown.

However, there has been speculation that the incident might be a warning sign expressed in connection with the identity issues over the use of 'Zomi' and 'Chin' as the explosion occurred just two days ahead of the nationwide census taking.

Police and intelligence are conducting an investigation, according to local sources.#

Ahead of by-elections, commission offices to open locally

21 April 2014 - The Election Commission of Chin State is to open offices in townships and districts ahead of the forthcoming by-elections and the 2015 General Elections.

In a meeting held at the State General Administration Office in Hakha early this month, the commission decided that office branches would be established in nine townships and three districts across Burma's western state.

They also agreed that new staff would be recruited for running the township and district offices, and that a series of workshops relating to election laws and roles of the Election Commission would be conducted in each township.

Lin Kyaw, of the Chin State Election Commission, told the *Hakha Post* that the meeting was held in preparation for the upcoming elections, adding: "These preparations are made so that the elections can be held smoothly and successfully. And we also want the public to understand properly laws related."

The meeting also decided on the need for translating laws concerning the elections into different Chin dialects which are to be chosen and put forward by the State Education Department.

The State Election Commission is made up of 15 members comprising six civilians and nine government officials from the Chin State government.

Burma plans to hold by-elections to fill 30 seats in parliament and state legislatures in November or December this year, and the nationwide General Election is scheduled to take place at the end of 2015, according to Tin Aye, Chairman of the Union Election Commission.

Only one parliamentary seat is up for grabs in Chin State for the upcoming by-elections. Ngun Mawng, the Lower House representative from Hakha constituency vacated his position following his appointment to the Union Civil Service Commission in late 2012.

According to the 2008 Burmese constitution, any elected representative appointed to the executive branch must resign his or her parliamentary seat.#

"These preparations are made so that the elections can be held smoothly and successfully. And we also want the public to understand properly laws related."

- Lin Kyaw, of the Chin State Election Commission

Press Release & Opinion

Media Release From Burma Campaign UK

For Immediate Release Tuesday 1st April 2014

Women From Burma Delegation Speak In British Parliament

A delegation of women from Burma spoke in the British Parliament today about ongoing human rights abuses, aid, and the political situation in Burma. (Picture attached)

The delegation of three women are on a ten day visit to the UK. The delegation consists of Jessica Nhkum from Kachin Women's Association Thailand, Rosalinn Zahau from Chin Human Rights Organization, and Pippa Curwen from Burma Relief Centre.

In addition to speaking at the British Parliament, the delegation spoke at two conferences organised by the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, are meeting the Department for International Development (DFID) and British Foreign Office, the official opposition shadow minister for international development with responsibility for Burma, and senior members of Parliament.

One concern raised by the delegation is that UK aid is almost entirely being directed through Burmese government approved channels to ethnic states, which makes it look like the UK is more interested in supporting the government, rather than maintaining neutrality. This contributes to the lack of confidence of the ethnic groups in the peace process.

"The British government should be supporting women's organisations from conflict zones which are helping victims of sexual violence in conflict," said Jessica Nhkum from Kachin Women's Organization. "At the moment the British government gives them no support for this work. The British government must also do more to pressure the government of Burma to agree to political dialogue to discuss the root causes of conflict, and allow humanitarian access in all of Kachin State."

"Human rights violations, especially of religious freedom, continue to affect the Chin despite reforms in other parts of Burma," said Rosalinn Zahau from Chin Human Rights Organisation. "Chin State is the poorest State and little is being done to tackle this. The situation for Chin refugees is also very serious. In New Delhi, many women and children are being subjected to sexual violence. We are concerned that there is pressure on Chin refugees in India to return to Burma, even though it is not safe for them to do so. We would like to see the British government pay more attention to the very serious problems which continue in Chin State and other ethnic states."

For interview or more information:

Rosalinn Zahau - Chin Human Rights Organisation
Jessica Nhkum - Kachin Women's Association Thailand
Zoya Phan - Burma Campaign UK

“A constant state of fear”: Chin refugee women and children in New Delhi

By [Rosalinn Zahau](#) and [Rachel Fleming](#)

25 March 2014

Ethnic Chin refugee women and children from Burma are the hidden victims of pervasive sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in New Delhi, India. Lacking confidence in the current peace process in Burma and unwilling to return home, the prospect of staying in New Delhi is both bleak and terrifying.

The predominantly Christian ethnic Chin people from Burma have been subjected to pervasive human rights abuses by State actors for the past twenty-five years. In fact, a [2011 report](#) by *Physicians for Human Rights* (PHR) concluded that such grave violations amount to crimes against humanity.

This persecution has forced an estimated 100,000 Chin to flee across the border to Mizoram in North-east India. India is not a party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Optional Protocol, nor does it have a domestic legal framework for the protection of refugees. In addition, India has not permitted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in New Delhi access to Mizoram. In the absence of legal protection and humanitarian assistance in Mizoram, some 8,000 Chin refugees have made the long journey to New Delhi to seek protection from UNHCR.

Mrs. O.* is one such refugee. She fled Chin State for India in 2006 due to constant harassment by Burma Army soldiers. She was sexually assaulted in New Delhi in 2011 by a local Indian man who forced his way into her home. She told CHRO,

“Since the incident I am in a constant state of fear and anxiety about living in New Delhi, and the prospect of facing this kind of assault again.”

Mrs. O. is one of many Chin women and children who fled Burma because of human rights abuses, only to face pervasive sexual and gender-based harassment and violence in New Delhi at the hands of local Indian men. Burmese refugee community-based organizations in New Delhi have documented [more than 200 violent attacks](#) over the past three years, over half of those sexual assaults.

Unfortunately, the [vicious cycle of discrimination](#), abuses, and abject poverty that Chin have experienced in their country of origin is simply recurring in their protracted urban refugee situation in New Delhi. A spate of recent violent assaults against people from the Northeast living in New Delhi, including the rape of 14 year-old Manipuri girl and the fatal beating of a student from Arunachal Pradesh, have sparked a [debate about racism in India](#). The physical characteristics that Chin share with indigenous peoples from Northeast India and Nepal - and their additional vulnerability as refugees - make them easily identifiable targets for discrimination in New Delhi. Of particular concern is SGBV against Chin women and children, ranging from groping to gang-rape.

Recent in-depth research conducted by CHRO with Chin refugee SGBV survivors and their families highlights the barriers to effective forms of redress, and refugees' hopes for their future.

Some of the barriers

Chin women and children are often assaulted in their own homes, or nearby, by local Indian men known to the victims. The overriding concern of Chin refugee survivors is their immediate safety. Extreme financial hardship means that survivors are unable to move to a somewhat safer location away from the per-

-petrator(s).

UNHCR and its implementing partners the Socio-Legal Information Centre (SLIC, which provides legal aid and mediation services) and Don Bosco Ashalayam (Don Bosco, which administers UNHCR subsistence allowance to vulnerable refugees) undoubtedly face limitations with regards to available funding to support survivors of SGBV, and also in their capacity to conduct outreach with the most vulnerable families.

The onus is therefore on survivors of SGBV to visit the offices of UNHCR and implementing partners for help. Financial hardship is also a significant barrier to pursuing a formal police complaint and legal case, which requires financial resources beyond the limited means of the poorest families.

Unfortunately, failings in service provision by UNHCR and its implementing partners - as well as an apparent culture of denial and victim-blaming within those organizations, representative of [prevailing attitudes within Indian society](#) - has resulted in a mutual lack of trust between those agencies and the Chin refugee community. This has become an additional barrier to effective redress.

Image credit: CHROMrs. C.'s two year-old daughter was sexually assaulted on the landing just outside the door of her home in August 2013 by a local Indian youth. The family has since faced [repeated harassment](#) from local youths. Mrs. C. told CHRO,

"I rushed to the Women Protection Clinic [part of UNHCR] to seek urgent help. But the security guards at the gate told me I wouldn't be able to see anyone and refused to let me inside. I was desperate, so I rushed to the emergency department of the DDU hospital [Deen Dayak Upadhyay, an Indian government hospital tied with UNHCR] to get some help for my daughter... But to my shock, the doctor just scolded me. He accused me of lying and said no-one would do such things to a small child. The doctor just ordered us to leave the room without conducting a proper examination.

The next day I went to SLIC to report the case. The staff from SLIC did not believe me at first.... But after the medical examination, the doctor confirmed that my daughter had been sexually assaulted. After that the staff at SLIC just told me I should be taking better care of my daughter and didn't offer me any proper advice... I expected the UNHCR implementing partners to understand our problem and provide us appropriate assistance and guide us on what we can do for my daughter's suffering. But all of them, including the doctor, were just blaming me for what had happened instead of helping us..."

Sadly, Mrs. C.'s experience is not an isolated case, but rather emblematic of the challenges facing Chin refugee survivors of SGBV and their families. Mrs. C. decided not to pursue a formal complaint, citing language difficulties and financial hardship.

Such barriers – in addition to the well-documented [systemic failures of the police](#), an inefficient Indian legal system, and the [chauvinism](#) that permeates India's public institutions at all levels – are preventing access to justice and effective forms of redress for Chin refugee survivors of SGBV and their families.

To date, only one rape case of a Chin refugee woman has resulted in a [successful conviction](#), with the perpetrator sentenced to 10 years in prison and fined 60,000 Rs (580 GBP). The court also directed the New Delhi government to pay reparations to the woman under the New Delhi Victims Compensation Scheme, which entitles a rape survivor to a minimum compensation of 300,000 Rs (2,900 GBP). On the one hand, this case has set an important precedent for justice for refugee rape victims. On the other hand, the victim and her family endured a prolonged ordeal and still face the same struggle for survival in New Delhi. In her own words:

“In total, we had to go to the court about 40 times. Whenever we went there, I had to face the culprit. We went through a very difficult time both mentally and financially.... There is respite for me that he is in prison now. But apart from that, I do not see any difference in my life by reporting about the incident. I hope that our family will be resettled to a third country, as I will feel safe being away from New Delhi. There is no meaning in our lives here in New Delhi. We cannot go back to Burma.”

Wait-and-see

UNHCR has pursued local integration as the primary durable solution for Chin refugees since the early 1990s, despite persistent protection issues. This continues today, alongside what appears to be a ‘wait-and-see’ approach in the hope that voluntary repatriation will soon become the primary solution. However, the prospect of a prolonged stay in New Delhi is bleak and terrifying for Chin refugee survivors of SGBV. The Chin refugee community in New Delhi views third country resettlement as the only viable solution for them, due to the ongoing protection issues they face as refugees in New Delhi, and their fears of renewed persecution by State actors if they were to return home.

Although the ethnic armed resistance group, the Chin National Front, signed a [ceasefire agreement](#) with the Union government in December 2012, the [Chin public lacks confidence](#) in the current peace process. While the overall prevalence of human rights violations documented by CHRO has declined, we continue to document very serious abuses since President Thein Sein's government took power in March 2011. These include [extra-judicial killing](#) and [sexual violence](#) in 2012, and [threats to burn down a village](#) for conversion to Christianity in October 2013.

The problems facing the Chin refugee population in New Delhi are undoubtedly complex, and require far greater resources for UNHCR and its implementing partners, coupled with a shift in mindset. However, they also require a change in policy. Voluntary repatriation is still a distant solution for most Chin refugees. To date, the peace process has not included any discussion of withdrawal of Burma Army troops from ethnic areas. Chin refugees will not want to return home until they know that there has been a permanent, publicly announced, independently verified withdrawal of Burma Army troops from their towns and villages as part of the peace process. Given the stark protection issues, in the short to medium term there should be greater focus on third country resettlement as a key durable solution, with urgent priority given to documented SGBV survivors.

**All names have been changed to protect the identities of SGBV survivors.*

[Note: The article was first published on openDemocracy.net on 25 March. It can be accessed at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/rosalinn-zahau-rachel-fleming/%E2%80%9Cconstant-state-of-fear%E2%80%9D-chin-refugee-women-and-children-in-new-delhi>]

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