

Internal displacement in Eastern Burma: 66,000 forced to leave their homes during the past year

Twenty years after the Burmese junta gunned down pro-democracy protesters, violations of human rights and humanitarian law in eastern Burma are more widespread and systematic than ever. Ten years after the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were submitted, the international response in eastern Burma remains largely ineffective in dealing with a predatory governing regime.

TBBC has been collaborating with ethnic community-based organisations to document the characteristics of internal displacement in eastern Burma since 2002. During this period there has been increasing debate about whether violations of human rights and humanitarian law in eastern Burma constitute an international crime. TBBC's latest report on internal displacement in eastern Burma compiles abuses reported during 2008 in relation to the legal framework for crimes against humanity.

The evidence presented appears to support Amnesty International's recent assessment that the violations committed in eastern Burma meet the legal threshold to constitute crimes against humanity.

Displacement in Eastern Burma is most commonly caused by coercive factors at the household level. Forced labour, extortion, land confiscation, agricultural production quotas, and restrictions on access to fields and markets has serious effects on household incomes and populations. During the past year, the prevalence of these factors has been exacerbated by hydro-electric projects in Shan and Karen States, mining projects in Shan and Karenni states and Pegu Division, a gas pipeline in Mon State as well as commercial agriculture and road construction in general.

"Porters have been used as mine sweepers and human shields during the day and tied up with ropes during the night."

(Man from Shan State, June 2008)

- The total number of internally displaced persons in eastern Burma is likely to be well **over half a million** people. At least 451,000 people have been estimated in the rural areas alone.
- During the past year, approximately **66,000 people were forced to leave their homes** due to the effects of armed conflict and human rights abuses.
- Approximately **224,000 people are currently in the temporary settlements** of ceasefire areas.
- An estimated **101,000 civilians are hiding** in areas most affected by military skirmishes.
- Approximately **126,000 villagers have been forcibly evicted by the Burmese Army into designated relocation sites**.
- During the past year, **forced displacement of 142 villages and hiding sites** was documented.

"We dare not make any noise. When a dog barks or a rooster crows, we are afraid that the Burmese Army will fire mortar shells into our hiding place."

(Karen woman, Papun Township, June 2008)



Displaced in the wet season, Papun, Karen State, June 2008, Photo: KORD

Download report:

[Internal Displacement and International Law in Eastern Burma](#)

Please send an e-mail to request a hard copy:

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Refugee camp population (TBBC's feeding figures)

As of October 31, 2008

The total feeding population in October for the 9 refugee camps in Thailand was **135,088**. For more detailed information, please visit TBBC's updated [population map](#)

Resettlement

As of October 31st, 2008 – Source: IOM

506 individuals from camps border wide left for resettlement during October. Since January 2008, **16,490** individuals have left for resettlement to the following countries: USA (13,707); Australia (1,550); Canada (622); Finland (270); Netherlands (142); Sweden (93); Norway (51); U.K (29); New Zealand (24); Denmark (1).

TBBC annual meetings in Brussels

During the last week of October, TBBC's donors and members met in Brussels to discuss prospects and challenges of the programme, as well as the budget for 2009. The meeting was hosted by [ICCO](#), one of TBBC's member agencies, at the EC offices. Long term strategies for support to the refugee communities was discussed as well as the more immediate impact of resettlement that will have an effect on the 2009 programme and budget. (See also previous e-Letter about the impact of resettlement).

At The Annual General Meeting for TBBC members, held the same week, Erol Kekik from Church World Service was re-elected chair of TBBC's 7 member board.

TBBC is pleased to announce that **Gandhiji Cultural** ([Birmania por la Paz](#)) from Spain was elected as TBBC's 12th member.

Read more about TBBC's donors and view the complete list of [TBBC's member agencies](#).

In Brussels, TBBC also participated in the The Burma Day. The conference, organised by ICCO; European Commission; Euro-Burma Office and Burma Centrum Nederland, brought together representatives from the civil society, government officials, UN, researchers and academics under the theme "Myanmar/ Burma Prospects for the Future."

Staff introduction

TBBC welcomes our new **Grants & Compliance manager, Mette Nøhr**. Mette has previously worked in Sri Lanka and Denmark and will add new skills to TBBC's grant reporting.

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Support the refugees from Burma

TBBC is the principal supplier of food, shelter and non-food items to the refugees from Burma. Find out more how you can contribute! Visit [TBBC's gift catalogue](#)



Camp community based organisation during a planning meeting

"We want to influence our own lives."

Each refugee camp along the Thailand-Burma border has its own elected decision making bodies, administration and camp workers. To ensure that the refugee communities' needs and aspirations are being met in all aspects of its programme, TBBC continually follows up with camp committees and community based organisations. The following are the voices of two persons that contribute to their own community and the maintenance of camp structures on a daily basis.

Camp Committee Leader:

When I came to the camp in 1997, I could see that people in the camp have no freedom and many problems. This situation affects their life and results in problems such as drinking and wife beating. That is why I became active in camp management. We want to be able to influence our own lives.

I also want to help the new arrivals that are still coming to the camp; they have been forced by the Burmese military to flee their homes. All they want is freedom and human rights. The only thing we as a camp committee can do to help them is to not send them back, and offer them food and safety.

I know that I cannot change the political situation, but in the camp, I can help my people.

Many people want to go for resettlement to another country. But for me, I am not interested in that.. I want to continue working for my community.



Camp committee leader of Tham Hin camp in front of camp map layout.

Warehouse Manager:

"Every first week of the month is the time for food distribution. It may take up to one week, and when it is finished, the warehouse must be cleaned. Then all the documentation must be checked- the monthly supply documents must be updated and reported back to TBBC.

I think I can make a difference here because people in the camp can openly give feedback to me about the supplies provided by TBBC. Through my work, I also make sure that the amount of supplies covers the camp population.

This work gives me skills in community management. If I did not do this, I would just stay at home. The work also makes me happy because it gives me an important function – helping my own community.