



PRESS RELEASE:

PROMOTING RECONCILIATION IN BURMA

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Bangkok – An alliance of humanitarian agencies working with displaced persons from Burma/Myanmar believes the current window of democratic reform is the best opportunity in decades to resolve ethnic conflict. The prospect of a genuine and inclusive process of national reconciliation bringing an end to decades of war and displacement needs to be promoted and realised.

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has raised the urgent need to grasp this opportunity after its annual survey of conditions in South East Burma found that more people had been forcibly displaced from their homes during the past year than any other since data was first collected in 2002. While government figures estimate that a quarter of the nation live in poverty, the survey found that almost two thirds of households in rural areas of the South East are unable to meet their basic needs.

Impoverishment was found to be particularly severe in the conflict-affected areas of northern Kayin State and eastern Bago Region. Comparative analysis with World Food Program surveys suggest that standards of living in Burma's South East are similar to conditions in Northern Rakhine State and far worse than those reported from the central Dry Zone.

“As much as the Arab Spring this year has given hope that political change can come rapidly even under the most repressive regimes, the ongoing violence in Egypt and elsewhere is a reminder that conflict transformation is a road littered with obstacles. A determined and sustained effort to resolve ethnic conflict in Burma is essential to avoid another generation of violence and abuse”, said Jack Dunford, TBBC's Executive Director.

TBBC's partner agencies have documented the destruction, forced relocation or abandonment of more than 3,700 civilian settlements in South East Burma since 1996. This includes 105 villages and hiding sites during the past year, when at least 112,000 people were forced to leave their homes. While some fled into Thailand as part of an ongoing flow of new refugee arrivals and others returned to former villages or resettled elsewhere in Burma, over 450,000 people currently remain internally displaced in the south eastern region.

“Democratic reforms by the new government are vital and welcomed, but the *Tatmadaw's* demands for ceasefire groups to form Border Guard Forces has escalated conflict and displacement in ethnic areas. As prospects for the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons are directly linked to national reconciliation, the urgency of finding a solution to conflict in Burma has never been greater”, said Mr Dunford.

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“Displacement and Poverty in South East Burma / Myanmar” is available from  
<http://www.tbbc.org/resources/resources.htm#idps>