



UNSAFE: Chins Seeking Refuge in Malaysia and New Delhi, India

September 2020

Report of Chin Association of Maryland



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Chin Association of Maryland

7405 Slipknot Alley
Elkridge, Maryland 21075
(443) 936-8616
info@chinmd.org
www.chinmd.org



I. Acknowledgement

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We express our appreciation to Adam Hunter, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA, for the Forward. We thank Roy Medley, American Baptist Church, Rev. Dr. Stephen Hre Kio, Senior Pastor, Indiana Chin Baptist Church, Bill Canny, Executive Director of Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, and for their statements of support and their continued support for Chins and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma.

The names of people in photos or who provided personal accounts used in the report and the names of people interviewed have not been included to protect their privacy and security.

We have tried our best to describe and analyze in good faith the situations of Chins from Myanmar/Burma seeking refuge in Malaysia and New Delhi, India. However, if we have inadvertently made any errors in this report, they are our own.

Zo Tum Hmung
Executive Director
Chin Association of Maryland, Inc

About Chin Association of Maryland, Inc.

Chin Association of Maryland, Inc. (CAM), is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Maryland. CAM provides support services and empowers the Chin communities in Maryland to be successfully integrated into American society. It also advocates for institutional change and durable solutions for Chins and other refugees and internally displaced persons through collaboration with Chin community organizations, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders.

For information, contact: info@chinmd.org | www.chinmd.org

II. Forward

On behalf of Refugee Council USA, a diverse coalition of organizations committed to the protection of refugees and other displaced persons, I welcome this report from the Chin Association of Maryland about the need for increased U.S. resettlement of refugees from Myanmar/Burma. The report serves as a critical reminder of the important continued need for the U.S. to restore its global leadership on refugee resettlement. I share in their call for the U.S. government to resettle 95,000 refugees in FY 2021 and to return to allocating goals by region.

The Chin, a Christian ethnic nationality from Myanmar/Burma, are among the many religious minority groups who have fled from the country's military – groups that include Rohingya Muslims and Christian Kachin, Karen, Karenni. In addition to religious minority groups, still others have been persecuted by the military and forced to flee from Myanmar/Burma.

We are mindful that this report comes at a time when COVID-19 remains challenging, and read with deep concern the additional impact the pandemic has on Chins and other refugees. The resettlement program is well equipped to operate safely, with public health protocols in place. Once resettled to the U.S., many refugees have played a positive role in the communities that have welcomed them, including as essential workers—more than 176,000 work in the healthcare sector and 175,000 in the food supply chain.¹

U.S. and UNHCR policy makers should carefully review this report and consider how to increase protection, humanitarian support, and resettlement for impacted refugees, including the Chins.

Adam Hunter, Executive Director
Refugee Council USA

¹ New American Economy, *Refugees on the Frontlines and as Essential Workers*, July 2020, <https://research.newamerican-economy.org/report/refugee-on-the-frontlines-covid-19/> (accessed September 15, 2020)

III. Statements of Support

"This report is timely and important to the need for protection of Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma seeking refuge in Malaysia and India. I have been advocating on behalf of these refugees for decades through travelling to Malaysia, Thailand and Myanmar/Burma as General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches. I hope that this report will remind the Administration and Congress to increase the number of refugee admissions for FY 2021."

Rev. Dr. Roy Medley
General Secretary Emeritus
American Baptist Churches USA
Advisory Board Member, CAM

"This is a well- documented report about why Chins and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma need protection in Malaysia and India. The need for providing humanitarian assistance also is extremely essential especially due to Covid-19. I pray that they will join us here in a land of opportunity, the United States, in the near future since voluntary repatriation to Myanmar/Burma is not a viable solution."

Rev. Dr. Stephen Hre Kio
Senior Pastor
Indiana Chin Baptist Church, Indianapolis
Advisory Board Member, CAM

"As the U.S. Catholic Bishops refugee agency, we have long stood in solidarity with Chin refugees and other vulnerable refugee groups from Burma, such as the Karen, Karenni, Kachin, Mon, Shan, Burman, and Rohingya. As part of our commitment to refugee protection and religious freedom, we stand with them again as they urge an increase in the resettlement of Chin and other refugees from Burma, and a rebuilding of the refugee resettlement program."

Bill Canny
Executive Director
Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

"Protecting the safety and freedom of those facing religious persecution has always been a bipartisan American value. The United States must affirm its support for Chin Christians and all refugees, and we must rebuild our resettlement program and restore our standing as a shining city on a hill."

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah
President & CEO
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

"The ongoing persecution of the Chin people, and the subsequent hardships encountered in Malaysia and India by Chin refugees, necessitate a robust international humanitarian response and U.S. leadership in the refugee protection space. The Chin people have demonstrated their strong resiliency and leadership, and we need them to listen to their stories, experiences, and recommendations for how to move forward. I commend this report as an eye-opening account of the current realities of the Chin people, and I hope it will serve as a catalyst for the U.S. government and broader community, especially for those in the church, to pray for, learn from, and advocate with the Chin people."

Jenny Yang
Vice President for Advocacy and Policy
World Relief

IV. Executive Summary

The Chin refugee community in the United States is grateful to the U.S. government and local communities across the country that have welcomed us. Resettlement has provided us protection and a chance to build new lives for our families. Meanwhile, we remain deeply concerned about ensuring similar durable solutions for Chin refugee families in Malaysia and India, as we once walked in their shoes. This report comes from the Chin Association of Maryland, Inc (CAM) and is financially sponsored by Chin churches in the United States. Based on the facts and analysis in this report we urge the U.S. Administration, Members of Congress, the Myanmar/Burma² government, and UNHCR in Malaysia and India to consider the protection and durable solution needs of the Chin Christian ethnic minority, particularly focusing on the need for increased resettlement and refugee family reunification.

Decades of religious, ethnic, and political persecution have led to a protracted regional humanitarian crisis and forced migration of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Myanmar/Burma. Among these refugees are the Chin people, an ethnic and religious minority that has mostly fled to neighboring Mizoram State, India, New Delhi, India, Malaysia, and Thailand.^{3,4} UNHCR has registered 153,190 refugees from Myanmar/Burma, including 101,320 Rohingyas, 22,510 Chins, and 29,350 others from Myanmar in Malaysia.⁵ The Independent Chin Community (ICC), an alliance of Chin organizations in Malaysia, has reported that there are Chins not registered with UNHCR who are not accounted for in those numbers. ICC reports a total of approximately 56,500 Chin seeking refuge in Malaysia, including 23,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers and 33,500 unregistered Chin (a small number of the unregistered are rejected cases).⁶ Additionally, up to 3,000 Chins are in need of refugee protection in New Delhi, India⁷ and up to 100,000 unregistered Chins are seeking refuge in Mizoram State, India.⁸

With neither host country being a signatory state of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,⁹ pursuing local integration for Chins in Malaysia and India has faced major hurdles as a sustainable durable solution, as further detailed in several earlier reports.^{10,11} More recent reports detailed in the pages below describe public xenophobia and discriminatory treatment towards Chins and others seeking refuge from Myanmar/Burma. Even more disturbing are reports of arbitrary arrests, detention and even deportation. These experiences leave the Chin community with serious concerns for the wellbeing of the Chin people in both Malaysia and New

2 The Union of Burma is the original English name for the country. In 1989, the government adopted the name Myanmar. The United States, Great Britain, other countries, and many resettled refugees continue to use the name “Burma”, while the EU uses the name “Myanmar/Burma.” For this report we use the name “Myanmar/Burma” out of respect for thousands of refugees and to acknowledge the current government.

3 Matthew Wilch, Zo Tum Hmung, Jenny Yang (December 2011), *Seeking Refuge: The Chin People in Mizoram, India*, <http://media.virbcdn.com/files/b3/FileItem-222256-SeekingRefugeTheChinPeopleinMizoramStateIndia1211pdf22912.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2020)

4 UNHCR, (March 2019), *UNHCR says ethnic Chin refugees may require continued international protection as security situation worsens in Myanmar*, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2019/3/5c8a31984/unhcr-says-ethnic-chin-refugees-require-continued-international-protection.html> (accessed August 28, 2020)

5 UNHCR, *Figures at a Glance in Malaysia*, July 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance-in-malaysia.html> (accessed September 15, 2020)

6 The ICC is an alliance formed to advocate on behalf of Chin protection matters. The ICC maintains a list of Chin seeking refuge from Myanmar/Burma and has reported significant issues with registration with UNHCR due to limited capacity.

7 The Chin Refugee Committee in New Delhi maintains a list of Chin refugees registered with UNHCR.

8 Wilch et al., *Seeking Refuge*, p 16, footnote 3.

9 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees, UN Treaty Collection, Chapter V, 2 and 5, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=V-2&chapter=5&Temp=mtdsg2&clang=en

10 Wilch et al., *Seeking Refuge: The Chin People in Mizoram, India*

11 The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) led a delegation in 2015 to Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia to show solidarity with refugees from Myanmar/Burma and report on the situation on the ground. See reports from a delegation: USCCB, (July 2016), *Moment of Decision: Seeking Durable Solutions in Southeast Asia*, <https://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/fact-finding-mission-reports/upload/Moment-of-Decision.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2020) and USCCB, (January 2017), UPDATE: *Moment of Decision: Seeking Durable Solutions in Southeast Asia*.

Delhi. As outlined in our report, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the already dire financial situations of Chins and others seeking refuge in Malaysia and New Delhi, India, leaving many without livelihoods and wrestling with how they will pay for their shelter, food, and medical care.

Unfortunately, voluntary repatriation to Myanmar/Burma is also not a viable durable solution. The historic moment in November 2015 when Aung San Suu Kyi led her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), to a landslide victory in Myanmar/Burma elections brought great hope for the peace process, for true reform to a federal democracy, and for moving toward a resolution of the protracted refugee situation.¹² However, despite NLD's efforts to amend the nation's 2008 constitution, the military maintains significant political control, and human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities in Myanmar/Burma persist.¹³ Furthermore, many major ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), such as those in the northern part of Myanmar/Burma who are members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC), have not yet signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). The Karenni National Progressive Party has also not signed the NCA. None of the non-signatory EAOs attended the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong, which took place from August 19 through August 21, 2020.¹⁴ Continued dialogue will likely not resume until after the Myanmar/Burma elections on November 8, 2020. Particularly relevant for the Chins, the reason that FPNCC members did not attend was because one of its members, the Arakan Army, was not invited to be part of the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong. Meanwhile, the fighting has intensified between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar/Burmese Army in southern Chin State and Rakhine State, causing many from those areas to flee to Malaysia.¹⁵

Christian Chins are part of a religious minority in Myanmar/Burma, Malaysia, and India where the predominant religions are Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, respectively. In 2016, the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released a special report about the plight of Chins and other Christians in Burma.¹⁶ In 2020 in its annual report, due to "systemic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom" USCIRF recommended that the U.S. government re-designate Myanmar/Burma as a "country of particular concern [CPC]."¹⁷ USCIRF's annual report particularly and properly focused on egregious violations against Rohingya Muslims, and it also described the continued armed conflict and forced displacement suffered by people in Chin State, Kachin State, and elsewhere.¹⁸

Because local integration and voluntary repatriation are not viable, durable solutions for most refugees from Myanmar/Burma, resettlement is the safest durable solution. To this end, we urge the Trump Administration to increase the overall target number of refugees resettled in the United States to 95,000, building the program back to historic norms, including a restoration of comparable regional admission levels of refugees from East Asia. The overall ceiling for fiscal year (FY) 2020 was only 18,000 which has severely limited the number of Chins and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma, including the Rohingya, that can be resettled. It also prevents many other deserving refugees from East Asia and other regions from receiving resettlement protection.

This report briefly outlines the context of persecution against Chins and other ethnic nationalities from Myanmar/Burma, but especially focuses on their current experiences in Malaysia and New Delhi, India,

12 USCCB, (July 2016), *Moment of Decision: Seeking Durable Solutions in Southeast Asia*

13 Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, (2019), *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burma*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/burma/> (accessed August 28, 2020)

14 The Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) includes the following groups: United Wa State Army, Arakan Army (AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army, Kachin Independence Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army. They announced they would not attend the NCA dialogue on August 13, 2020. See: Zaw Min Naing, (August 14, 2020), *FPNCC members will not attend upcoming peace conference*, <https://eleven-myanmar.com/news/fpncc-members-will-not-attend-upcoming-peace-conference> (accessed August 28, 2020).

15 Department of State, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burma*

16 Rachel Fleming, *The Hidden Plight of Christian Minorities in Burma*, USCIRF, 2016, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Hidden%20Plight.%20Christian%20Minorities%20in%20Burma.pdf> (accessed September 9, 2020)

17 USCIRF, (2020), *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2020*, p 12-13, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_Final_42920.pdf (accessed August 28, 2020)

18 Ibid.

as urban refugees, asylum seekers, and people seeking refuge. The information detailed was obtained by CAM from Chin community leaders in Malaysia and New Delhi,¹⁹ who conducted in-depth field assessments in each location and gathered data related to Chin protection issues and obstacles to local integration, education, and health, with a further focus on how the Chins are coping in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. CAM followed a uniform methodology for data collection in Malaysia and New Delhi, which is further detailed in Section V.

We include the stories and information outlined below to highlight the urgent and serious need for increased international action. We hope this report conveys the values of the Chin people: a deep, loving concern for family and a strong commitment to religious freedom.

¹⁹ For protection of the Chin community leaders, their identity is not made public in the report, but CAM can make it confidentially available to U.S. or UNHCR policy makers on request.

Recommendations

For the United States Government

1. Advocate with Malaysia for the protection of those seeking refuge from arbitrary arrest, extortion, detention, and deportation back to Myanmar/Burma, especially because of its status as a country of particular concern as a violator of religious freedom, and its ongoing pattern of religious and ethnic persecution.
2. Build back the U.S. refugee resettlement program to normal levels by setting an annual refugee admission goal of 95,000 in FY 2021 and setting regional allocations consistent with the historic norms and current urgent needs in each region, including the urgent needs in East Asia for Chins and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma.
3. Share in the humanitarian responsibility for refugees with Malaysia and India by increasing the resettlement of Chins and other ethnic minority refugees from Myanmar/Burma for resettlement as persecuted, religious minorities with strong family ties in the United States.
4. Continue your support for religious minorities such as the Chin Christians and your commitment to religious freedom internationally by providing increased funding for humanitarian assistance to prevent and respond to religious freedom violations in Myanmar/Burma.
5. Lift the travel ban applied to thirteen countries including Burma that was expanded on January 31, 2020 that prevents the beneficiaries of immigrant visas for Chin and other families from Myanmar/Burma seeking to reunite with family in the United States.²⁰
6. Provide immediate humanitarian assistance and food aid to Malaysia and India in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing humanitarian crisis to help Chins and others seeking refuge who facing hunger and significant barriers to COVID-19 testing and treatment.
7. Provide more financial support to the offices of both UNHCR in Malaysia and New Delhi, India, to increase their capacities related to protection and livelihood support.
8. Engage the governments of Malaysia and India to consider facilitating self-sufficiency and resilience of Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma living in Malaysia and India by improving their livelihood opportunities, including through access to work authorization.

For Myanmar/Burma

1. End the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.
2. Accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol and the Statelessness Conventions.
3. Sign a sustainable Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with all ethnic armed organizations and include them all in the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong.
4. Secure justice and peace in Chin State and other states with all ethnic nationalities to enable future safe voluntary repatriation of Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma and include refugees in the political dialogue.
5. Pursue ongoing federal democratic, systemic reform inside Myanmar/Burma.

²⁰ P.P. 9983 is an expansion of P.P. 9946 which restricts visas to seven countries. There are 13 countries: Burma, Eritrea, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Nigeria, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Venezuela, and Yemen. Source: State Department's website: P.P. 9645 and P.P. 9983 – <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/presidential-proclamation-archive/presidential-proclamation9645.html?wcmmode=disabled>

For UNHCR Malaysia

1. Advocate for the protection of Chins and others seeking refuge from Myanmar/Burma from arbitrary arrest, extortion, detention, and deportation, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Support and help to facilitate increased U.S. resettlement from Malaysia and New Delhi, India, for Chin refugees and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma.
3. Continue advocacy with the Malaysian government for protection and improved livelihoods for Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma, including efforts to improve access to public education, health care and insurance, work authorization, and child protection.
4. Provide immediate protection and financial and health assistance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, including improved access to testing and treatment and assistance to meet basic needs.
5. Open up previously rejected cases and current pending cases to make a new determination on their refugee status given the deteriorating conditions for Chins in Malaysia and Myanmar/Burma.
6. Increase efforts to register the vulnerable unregistered and newly arrived Chins and others from Myanmar/Burma seeking refuge.

For UNHCR India

1. Support and help to facilitate increased U.S. resettlement for Chins, other refugees from Myanmar/Burma, and other refugees in New Delhi in need of resettlement protection.
2. Continue advocacy with the Indian government for protection and improved livelihoods for refugees from Myanmar/Burma who are in New Delhi, including access to public education, health care and insurance, work authorization and child protection.
3. Open up previously rejected cases and current pending cases to make a new determination on their refugee status given the deteriorating conditions for Chins in India and Myanmar/Burma.
4. Provide emergency protection and financial and health assistance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic including improved access to testing and treatment and assistance to meet basic needs.

Map of Myanmar/Burma, including States and Regions²¹



21 Ministry of Immigration and Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census*, May 2015, p ii, <https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Chin%20State%20Census%20Report%20-%20ENGLISH.pdf> (accessed September 9, 2020)

V. Background and Current Chin Refugee Context

Chinland was an independent territory until the British annexation in 1896 and the British ruled the territory with the Chin Hill Regulations together with other territories including Kachin Hills, Shan States, and Burma.²² Each were separately invaded, occupied, and governed by British colonists under separate constitutions: the Kachin Hill Tribes Regulation in 1895, the Chin Hills Regulation in 1896, the Shan States Act in 1888 (later became the Federated Shan States Act of 1922), and the Burma Act of 1935 for Burma and territories under its rule.²³ On February 12, 1947 Chin leaders signed the Panglong Agreement in Shan State, Myanmar/Burma with Burma, Kachin, Karen and Shan to gain independence from Britain speedily and form a Union based upon equal rights and equal standing.²⁴ Thus, the Union of Myanmar/Burma came into being on February 1, 1948 after independence from Britain.

Map of Chin State by Districts and Townships^{25b}



22 Panglong Agreement: Defining Panglong Agreement, Panglong Promises, and Panglong Spirit, http://burmese.burmaenac.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/20180920_Panglong-Handbook_Combined-BE.pdf (accessed September 22, 2020)

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

The Chins, who are over 85 percent Christian,^{25a} are an ethnic nationality in Myanmar/Burma that has suffered from religious and ethnic persecution dating back to the mid-20th Century. It began with a 1962 military coup led by General Ne Win. Following the coup were years of violence, armed conflict, and totalitarian rule in Myanmar/Burma.²⁶ In 1988 a briefly successful pro-democratic uprising in Myanmar/Burma ultimately resulted in hundreds of deaths and ended in a military coup that marked an increased militarization in the country, including in Chin State.²⁷ For over half a century, ethnic groups have fought for self-determination and federal democracy in Myanmar/Burma and for over three decades the National League for Democracy (NLD) has fought for federal democratic rule, which has been continuously met by resistance from successive military regimes in power in Myanmar/Burma.²⁸

A seminal report conducted by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) in 2010 documented the experiences of people in the Chin State under military rule. Rampant human rights abuses and religious freedom violations ensued at the hands of the Burmese Army (Tatmadaw), including torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, and significant restrictions on religious freedom, political expression, and movement for many ethnic and religious minorities during this time.²⁹ Over 91% of respondents in the study experienced forced labor.³⁰ Furthermore, approximately 90% of households in the study reported cases of arbitrary arrest, abduction, forced conscription, or religious or ethnic persecution.³¹ In 2011, another report, *Seeking Refuge: The Chin People in Mizoram, India* was produced which provided additional information about the human rights and religious persecution suffered by the Chins.³²

In November 2015, it appeared that the long nightmare was finally ending. Aung San Suu Kyi, human rights icon, led the National League for Democracy (NLD) party to a landslide election victory. This brought great hope for the peace process, for true reform towards a federal democracy, and for movement toward a resolution of the protracted refugee situation.³³

With hope still in the air, in June of 2018, UNHCR initially concluded that Chin refugees from Myanmar/Burma no longer were in need of international protection and that the social, political, and security situation in the Sagaing Region and Chin State of Myanmar/Burma had improved such that the Chin people could safely return.³⁴ UNHCR continued to monitor the situation in the region³⁵ and later reversed their decision given the worsening security context and continued reports of violence and displacement against the Chin and other minority groups in Myanmar/Burma. In March 2019, UNHCR reaffirmed that Chins still need international refugee protection.³⁶

25a Ministry of Immigration and Population, (May 2015), *2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census*, https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNION_2C_Religion_EN.pdf (accessed September 6, 2020)

25b Ibid., p ii

26 Human Rights Watch, (January 2009), *"We Are Like Forgotten People": The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/27/we-are-forgotten-people/chin-people-Myanmar/Burma-unsafe-Myanmar/Burma-unprotected-india> (accessed August 28, 2020)

27 Ibid.

28 Department of State, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burma*

29 Richard Sollom, Chris Beyrer, Adam Richards, Vit Suwanvanichkij, Parveen Parmar, Luke Mullany, and John Bradshaw, *Life Under the Junta: Evidence of Crimes Against Humanity in Burma's Chin State*, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), (Cambridge, MA, 2011), pp. 26-35, available at PHR, <https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/life-under-the-junta-burma-chin-state.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2020)

30 Ibid

31 Ibid

32 Wilch et al., *Seeking Refuge: The Chin People in Mizoram, India*

33 USSCB, (July 2016), *Moment of Decision: Seeking Durable Solutions in Southeast Asia*

34 Rashvinjeet S. Bedi, (June 2018), *UNHCR: Chin refugees no longer need UN protection as Myanmar's Chin State now stable*, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/06/29/unhcr-chin-refugees-no-longer-need-un-protection-as-myanmars-chin-state-now-stable> (Accessed August 28, 2020)

35 As part of UNHCR further deliberation, Richard Towle, UNHCR Representative for Malaysia, met with the Independent Chin Community (ICC), an alliance of all Chin refugee communities in Malaysia, and with Mr. Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director of CAM, who traveled to Malaysia to help share Chins' continued protection concerns.

36 UNHCR (March 14, 2020) *UNHCR Says Ethnic Chin Refugees Require Continued International Protection*, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2019/3/5c8a31984/unhcr-says-ethnic-chin-refugees-require-continued-international-protection.html> (accessed September 9, 2020)

Indeed, despite NLD's efforts to amend the nation's 2008 constitution, the military maintains significant political control and human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities in Myanmar/Burma continue with impunity.³⁷ Particularly disturbing has been a rise in the kind of religious and ethnic persecution by the military that Chins and others have suffered for years. The military forced over 700,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh and over 100,000 Kachin Christians remain forcibly displaced in their home state.³⁸ Meanwhile, the fighting has intensified between the Arakan Army and the Burmese Army in southern Chin State and Rakhine State, causing many Chins and others to flee to Malaysia.

Furthermore, nine EAO's have yet to sign the NCA. The members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) were not in attendance at the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong-- which took place from August 19 through August 21, 2020.³⁹ Continued dialogue will likely not resume until after the Myanmar/Burma elections on November 8, 2020.

Much work is needed in Myanmar/Burma to enable a genuine federal democracy system to prevail.⁴⁰ The NLD has attempted to amend the constitution to reduce military representation and power in parliament through two different proposals, but so far neither has been adopted.⁴¹ One approach would be to gradually reduce the proportion of seats in Parliament reserved for the military, with the military's share of seats going from 25 to 15 percent after the 2020 election, from 15 to 10 percent after 2025, and from 10 to 5 percent after 2030. The second approach would be to remove the military's effective veto over any proposed amendment to the constitution by changing the requirement for approving a charter amendment from more than 75 percent of Parliament to just two-thirds of elected representatives, excluding the military appointees.⁴²

Further, the NLD has not produced tangible progress in the peace process. The Arakan Army was not invited to this fourth round of the Union Peace Conference- 21st Century Panglong which ended on August 21, 2020.⁴³ As a result, their alliance, the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC), led by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) also did not attend.⁴⁴ In addition, the Karenni National Progressive Party has not signed the NCA. It is one of 9 EAO's that still have not signed the NCA.

During the recently completed fourth round of the Union Peace Conference - 21st Century Panglong, participants agreed to Union Accord Part III, which is a positive step for peace in Myanmar/Burma and has been approved by parliament.⁴⁵ It articulates various principles needed for peace. These include the implementation of the NCA among all EAOs and to implement it in a step-by-step process. It also includes the fundamental principle that the Union must be based on a federal democratic system.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, without a ceasefire and peace agreement that includes all parties there is no immediate end to the dangerous security conditions in Myanmar/Burma that have often been the cause of forced displacement of ethnic nationals. In the current day, human rights violations and instability persist in Myanmar/Burma. The U.S. State Department's Bureau on Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor recent 2019

37 Department of State, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burma*

38 USCIRF, (2020), *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2020*, p 12-13

39 Zaw Min Naing, (August 14, 2020), *FPNCC members will not attend upcoming peace conference*, <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/fpncc-members-will-not-attend-upcoming-peace-conference> (accessed August 28, 2020).

40 USCCB, (July 2016), *Moment of Decision: Seeking Durable Solutions in Southeast Asia*

41 San Yamin Aung, (February 14, 2020), *"How Does the NLD's Push to Amend Myanmar's Constitution Differ From the US-DP's?"*, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/how-does-the-nlds-push-to-amend-myanmars-constitution-differ-from-the-usdps.html>

42 National Reconciliation and Peace Centre, (August 27, 2020), *"Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves Union Accord Part III"* webpage <http://www.nrpc.gov.mm/en/node/471?fbclid=IwAR2MXYZaqZg3y9h5edY6YC2WLJVwOu9DtrLTrlev5iADyJJCvNflovfZHI> (accessed August 30, 2020)

43 Zaw Min Naing, (August 14, 2020), *FPNCC members will not attend upcoming peace conference*

44 Ibid.

45 National Reconciliation and Peace Centre, (August 27, 2020), *"Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves Union Accord Part III"* webpage <http://www.nrpc.gov.mm/en/node/471?fbclid=IwAR2MXYZaqZg3y9h5edY6YC2WLJVwOu9DtrLTrlev5iADyJJCvNflovfZHI> (accessed August 30, 2020)

46 National Reconciliation and Peace Centre, *"Union Accord Part III"* webpage <http://www.nrpc.gov.mm/en/index.php/node/470> (accessed August 30, 2020)

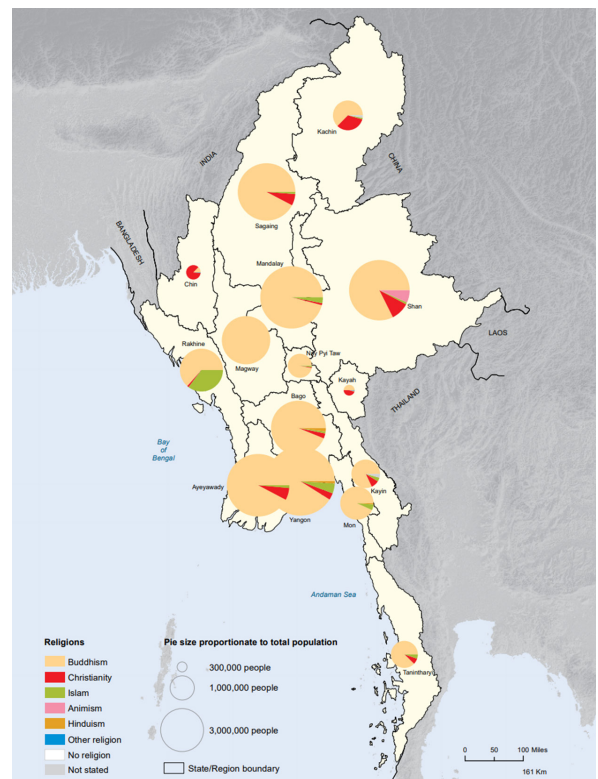
report on conditions in Myanmar/Burma cited arbitrary killings, disappearances, and detention by security forces, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, arbitrary detention and life-threatening prison conditions, forced labor, and economic suppression.⁴⁷

Religious persecution and severe restrictions to religious freedom continue to be a significant threat to the lives of Chins, Kachins and other Christians in Burma^{48a} and other religious minorities, including the Rohingya Muslims.⁴⁹ The 2008 constitution recognizes Buddhism as the de facto religion in Myanmar/Burma. Even though it also acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Animism, ethnic and religious minorities have continued to face persecution.⁵⁰ Over the years such persecution has led many Chin and other ethnic nationals to flee the country due to religious and ethnic persecution, including the Chin, Karen, Karenni, Kachin, Shan, and Mon.⁵¹ As noted above, Rohingya Muslims also have been a major target for atrocities in recent years. The map refers to religions represented by state and region in Myanmar/Burma.⁵²

Ideally, Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma would be able to voluntarily repatriate to their country. However, this has not been a durable solution for decades and there are few indicators that repatriation is safe and sustainable in the immediate future without a peace agreement or the signed NCA, particularly in light

of the military's ongoing pattern of brutal religious and ethnic persecution. With lives at-risk, many Chin have sought refuge in neighboring India, Malaysia and Thailand.⁵³ As detailed in the following pages of this report, the Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma have had serious protection and humanitarian challenges, facing human rights abuses, discrimination, religious repression, and extreme poverty in their refugee host community. Many refugee children have little hope for their future as they struggle to access education and are often forced to work where they experience disturbing child labor abuses. Further, the Chin people's financial and protection situations have only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To that end, resettlement is currently the safest durable solution for Chin refugees. In the past decade refugees from Myanmar/Burma represented 21% of the refugees resettled by the United States, the largest group resettled in the country during this time.⁵⁴ As of September 7, 2020 179,212 refugees from Myanmar/Burma have been resettled in the United States since 2002.⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ Many of them are now residing in various states including Indiana, Texas, Iowa, Kansas, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan,



47 Department of State, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burma*

48a Rachel Fleming, *The Hidden Plight of Christian Minorities in Burma*

49 USCIRF, (2020), *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2020*, p 12-13

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, *Census Atlas Myanmar*, May 2015, p 27, <https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Chin%20State%20Census%20Report%20-%20ENGLISH.pdf> (accessed September 9, 2020)

53 Human Rights Watch, (January 2009), *"We Are Like Forgotten People": The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*

54 Brittany Bizzard and Jeane Batalova, (June 13, 2019), *Refugees and Asylees in the United States*, Migration Policy Institute, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states-2018> (accessed August 28, 2020)

55 Refugee Processing Center/U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). https://ireports.wrapsnet.org/Interactive-Reporting/EnumType/Report?ItemPath=/rpt_WebArrivalsReports/MX%20-%20Arrivals%20for%20a%20Demographic%20Profile. (accessed September 7, 2020)

56 Approximately 70,000 Chins live in the United States. 63,083 have arrived from Malaysia and India. The rest include asylees through The U.S. territory Guam, family reunification, and religious workers. (Source: Chin Association of Maryland, Inc)

Missouri, and Maryland. The Chins in the United States are grateful to the U.S. government and American people for the protection and opportunity to build a new life for their families that resettlement has provided them. They are an active and vibrant population in the United States. They contribute positively to society, maintain strong family ties, and provide substantial support for one another. The resettled Chin refugees are especially concerned for their family members who continue to experience persecution in Myanmar/Burma, or face serious protection issues in Malaysia, and India. Chins in the United States send remittances and continue to advocate for durable solutions for the Chin and other persecuted ethnic groups from Myanmar/Burma.

With drastic cuts in the U.S. refugee program annual admission goal to just 18,000 refugees in FY 2020 (down from 85,000 in FY 2016), the number of Chin refugees resettled in the United States has declined significantly.⁵⁷ CAM, through the support and sponsorship of the Chin community in the United States, has continued to advocate on behalf of Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma living in Malaysia and India. Advocacy activities have included meetings in August 2019 with the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Refugee Council USA, and UNHCR in Washington, D.C. to urge an increase in refugee admissions for FY 2020. Additionally, CAM travelled to Malaysia and met with refugee communities and UNHCR officials in Kuala Lumpur to advocate for increased protection abroad.

This report by CAM, made possible through the financial sponsorship of the Chin refugee churches in the United States, is another effort for advocacy for the protection of Chin and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma. It outlines serious protection and livelihood concerns in Malaysia and New Delhi, making a strong case for resettlement to a safe, third country.

Report Methodology

The information detailed in the following sections of the report were obtained by CAM from Chin community leaders in New Delhi, India and Malaysia.⁵⁸ They conducted in-depth field assessments in each location and gathered information related to Chin experiences of local integration (or lack of), education, health, and how they are coping in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Information was obtained in July and August of 2020. Chin community leaders obtained information through interviews with Chin refugees and refugee community sources. Additionally, CAM conducted phone interviews with refugees in both locations. The Chin community leaders also worked closely with UNHCR as well as other ethnic organizations of Myanmar/Burma to gather information. All information in the following sections was produced from the in-depth field assessments unless otherwise cited in the footnotes.

VI. Serious Protection Issues in Malaysia

Unregistered Chins Seeking Refuge

In Malaysia there are approximately 177,940 registered refugees and asylum seekers, the vast majority, 153,190, of whom are from Myanmar/Burma. The ICC reports that there are approximately 55,500 Chin people seeking refuge in Malaysia, registered refugees and asylum seekers (23,000) as well as many Chin who are unregistered (32,500) including a small amount of rejected cases.⁵⁹ Currently, registration with UNHCR is difficult for many Chin due to UNHCR capacity and registration more recently moving online,

⁵⁷ The worldwide ceiling for refugee admissions in 2020 is capped at 18,000, the lowest it has ever been since the inception of the program. See: Congressional Research Service, (November 7, 2019), Refugee Ceiling and Allocations, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/IN11196.pdf>, (accessed September 6, 2020)

⁵⁸ For protection of the Chin community leaders, their identity is not made public in the report, but CAM can make it confidentially available to U.S. or UNHCR policy makers on request.

⁵⁹ The ICC maintains a list of Chin seeking refuge from Myanmar/Burma and has reported significant issues with registration with UNHCR due to limited capacity.

which creates a barrier for some Chin. Those seeking refuge live all throughout Malaysia, however the majority live in the states of Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang, Johor, and Kedah.

While Chin people have been seeking refuge in Malaysia for decades, they still remain vulnerable and without a durable solution. Malaysia is not a signatory country to the Refugee Convention or Protocol nor does it have a domestic legal framework to provide asylum or otherwise to regulate the status and rights of refugees. The 22,510 Chin refugees who have been able to register with UNHCR, have been provided limited protections against immigration enforcement as well as provisions for assistance to improve material conditions. However, the protection needs are greater than current resources for those who are registered and especially for the additional 32,500 Chins who are unregistered. UNHCR needs more capacity to register and protect those seeking refuge and to help them to navigate online registration, which is a barrier for some. The need for increased UNHCR protection capacity is critical to prevent arrests, detention, and deportations and to help improve the livelihoods of Chins seeking refuge in Malaysia.

Ethnicity	Individuals Seeking Refuge from Myanmar/Burma (includes unregistered) in Malaysia and UNHCR ⁶⁰
Chin	56,500
Kachin	5,000
Karen	3,000
Karenni	400
Mon	15,000
Arakan	20,000
Shan	500
Rohingyas	101,320
Total	193,220

Chin Community Groups in Malaysia ⁶¹	Population of Chin per NGO group
Alliance of Chin Refugees	30,000
Chin Refugee Committee	7,000
DAI Community	1,500
Falam Refugee Organization	4,000
Zomi Association Malaysia	14,000
Total	56,500

60 The number of Rohingyas in the table is the number registered by UNHCR. UNHCR, “*Figures at a Glance in Malaysia*,” Other numbers in the table are provided by the Coalition of Burma Ethnic Malaysia (COBEM) and include both registered and unregistered totals.

61 The Independent Chin Community (ICC), an alliance of Chin organizations, is responsible for data collecting from its Chin refugee member organizations and works hard with UNHCR and other NGOs to help protect these community members. The numbers in the table are according to ICC reports on the population of Chin Refugees and Asylum seekers living in Malaysia. Numbers reflect more than what UNHCR has registered because they include Chins who had registration issues. These are among the cases that we are urging UNHCR to review.

Mr. H was a pastor in Chin State and faced persecution due to his pastoral ministries, so he fled to Malaysia. In 2007, Mr. H was granted refugee status by UNHCR in Kuala Lumpur. In February 2019, Mr. H and his family were interviewed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for resettlement to the United States. When Mr. H inquired regarding his case status in early 2020, he received a response that he will likely not be able to resettle to the United States this year due to the substantial decrease in the U.S. refugee program. He has been in Kuala Lumpur with his wife and son for over 10-years.

New Malaysian Administration cracking down on Unregistered

The beginning of 2020 has been marked by a political crisis in Malaysia. It has led to Mahathir Mohamed resigning as prime minister and being replaced by Muhyiddin Yassin. The new Malaysian administration has more restrictive immigration enforcement policies and has significantly cracked down against those seeking refuge who are unregistered in the country. In fact, the Chin Refugee Committee has been informed of 11 deportations of Chin seeking refuge in Malaysia. Furthermore, not even all refugees registered with UNHCR have been shielded from arrests.

Mr. D. is a near 60-year old Chin refugee in Malaysia. In 2012, he and his family were able to obtain UNHCR refugee cards. His wife's has poor health and they have daughter who lives in the United States. They have been awaiting an interview with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for a long time, hoping for resettlement and a promising future.



Chin community leaders helping community members with medical treatment due to difficulty accessing proper medical care

Health

Chins seeking refuge in Malaysia face significant limitations to accessing needed health care due to cost and their ability to access health clinics. Unregistered Chin often are charged double the cost of medical care, while those registered as refugees receive reduced fees for medical care. However even at reduced cost, many Chin refugees still find it difficult to cover more substantial medical services (e.g. childbirth, surgery, medical care needed after accidents). Some Chin refugees also face barriers to accessing health clinics, especially those who live in more rural areas and have to travel a great distance for the nearest health clinic. Especially for unregistered Chins, traveling not only puts them at heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19 but also puts them at greater risk of arrest, detention, and deportation.

Such experiences have caused Chin refugees to bear significant health burdens. For example, women have resorted to giving birth in their homes to avoid hospital fees. Not only does this increase health risks, they also are not bringing their babies to the hospitals to be vaccinated, putting children at risk for contracting illness. Beyond physical health, some Chin refugees have significant unmet mental health needs including trauma and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), stress and anxiety, and other issues related to both their premigration and host country experiences. In some instances, this has led to domestic violence and self-harm. Finally, Chin refugees often face major obstacles accessing healthcare that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.



Chin community leaders helping community members with medical treatment due to difficulty accessing proper medical care

Education

Young Chin refugees in Malaysia face serious barriers to even basic education because they are not granted access to the country's formal education sector. Instead, they are enrolled in the 133 community learning centers across the country. Of the 23,823 children of concern to UNHCR in Malaysia who are of school going age, just 30% are enrolled in school. The majority of those enrolled in school are in primary education (44%) with fewer enrolled in secondary (16%) and early childhood/pre-school (14%) education.

Due to lack of access to public schools, the lack of resources to pay private school fees, and unmet family needs because of poverty, refugee children often resort to working after completing primary school. At such young ages, Chin refugee children forgoing school may be subjected to harsh working conditions and low wages, with little hope for their own futures. UNHCR is working with implementing partners in Malaysia to improve educational opportunities for children of concern including expanding access to secondary and higher education, improving the safety in learning environments, and enhancing the quality of education. Additionally, the Chin refugee community in the United States provides financial support to help pay for education for Chin children. However, the need is significant and more urgent efforts are needed to improve Chin families' livelihood, and the educational opportunities for young Chins in Malaysia. Chin youth need to have hope for their futures.



Chin refugee children in a community learning center. Refugees are not eligible to enter into the formal school system in Malaysia because of their immigration status.

COVID-19

On March 16, 2020, the government of Malaysia implemented a Movement Control Order (MCO) to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The virus had already disproportionately impacted the wellbeing of Chin refugees and others seeking refuge from Myanmar/Burma.⁶² The MCO forced many businesses to close. For Chin refugees working in the informal labor economy and living on day-to-day wages, meeting basic household needs including food has become even more difficult. Community organizations, NGOs, and local churches have stepped forward to provide food assistance to those in need, however securing food assistance has not come without challenges. Delivery of assistance requires having a list of refugees in need. Another logistical hurdle is travel restrictions that make it difficult to deliver the aid.

The ICC was able to contribute to the effort by collecting a list of 1,684 registered families in need and connect them with food from local groups. The Alliance for Chin Refugees (ACR) also set up to disperse dry goods to around 300 Chins who lived near the Pudu market, one third of them were children. Additionally, UNHCR announced the opening of an outreach center in Johor to assist refugees with vital services and assistance, which will be especially helpful during these precarious times.⁶³ Nevertheless, the need to facilitate livelihoods and provide transitional humanitarian assistance for the Chin in Malaysia is great and more resources and efforts are needed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made life for those seeking refuge in Malaysia extremely difficult. There have been public accusations that foreign-born persons are spreading the virus and accusations that refugees are taking jobs during a plummeting economic crisis in the country.⁶⁴ The public xenophobia about foreign-born persons in Malaysia has coincided with harsh immigration enforcement activities making refugees and asylum seekers with or without documentation vulnerable to arrest. Reports indicated that approximately 2,000 migrants have been arrested in Malaysia, including asylum seekers and over 98 children.⁶⁵ As more formal documentation is sparse regarding immigration enforcement activities,⁶⁶ recent field work reports by local Chin refugees indicated that from March 13 – August 20, 2020 approximately 118 Chins were arrested and detained allegedly for violating the MCO and immigration restrictions, and some were even deported.⁶⁷ The ACR informed the UNCHR about the deportation, and their whereabouts were unknown in Myanmar/Burma. Reports on the conditions of the detention centers indicate they are overcrowded, unsanitary, and that detainees are not provided with masks. This has led to widespread concerns about health impacts of prolonged detention and the ongoing risk of deportation as has happened previously. Chin churches and community organizations in the United States are financially supporting the families of those arrested, however more urgent and systemic protection needs remain.

62 Aidil Razak, (May 21, 2020), *UNHCR urged to develop mechanism to assist detained refugees, asylum seekers*, https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/05/594360/unhcr-urged-develop-mechanism-assist-detained-refugees-asylum-seekers?fbclid=IwAR2D7sThgjaesCDAgo_NtEUY-lsTthnnsRW4AIPcEmAOgkEk8qSEOif-XSs (accessed August 28, 2020)

63 UNHCR, (June 2020), *UNHCR and partners bring essential services to vulnerable refugees outside KL through outreach centre*, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2020/7/5f225edb4/unhcr-and-partners-bring-essential-services-to-vulnerable-refugees-outside.html> (accessed August 28, 2020)

64 Emily Ding, *Malaysia's Coronavirus Scapegoats*, Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/19/malysias-coronavirus-scapegoats/> (accessed August 28, 2020)

65 Ibid.

66 As of August 2020, UNHCR said they had received no reports of refugees during the MCO.

67 The ICC was made aware of 11 deportations of Chin refugees on June 11, 2020.



Malaysian police in Pudu set up a baracade to make sure Chin refugees do not leave their communities to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Such restrictions make it difficult to work and earn an income.

VII. Serious Protection and Humanitarian Issues in New Delhi, India

Chin refugees from Myanmar/Burma represent the majority of displaced persons from Myanmar/Burma seeking refuge in bordering India. Chin in New Delhi are in an urban refugee setting. Many Chin settle in West Delhi in the areas of Vikas Puri, Janak Puri, and Uttam Nagar. Chin also have settled in Mizoram, a state in northeast India that borders Chin State.⁶⁸ India is not a signatory state to the Refugee Convention or Protocol, and thus Chins seeking refuge in India have long experienced difficulty with protection issues, securing and maintaining livelihoods, and pursuing a durable solution.⁶⁹

The Chin Refugee Committee of New Delhi estimated there are up to 3,000 Chins seeking refuge in New Delhi, including Chin refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR, cases pending with UNHCR, and some cases rejected by UNHCR. UNHCR has granted some Chins seeking refuge in New Delhi with refugee status, providing them the legal right to remain in India with a long-term residency permit. However, most Chins have been unable to register and are at-risk for deportation. Moreover, recently, the Indian government has pushed back on residency permits and has taken them away from those who have been in the country longer than 6-years. With the degraded security conditions in Myanmar/Burma and the military's continued pattern of ethnic, religious persecution against the Rohingyas and Kachins, and with armed conflict in Chin State, the Chins in New Delhi have not felt safe to return home.

Without the legal right to work in India, Chins often work in the informal labor sector in low-wage jobs that are generally physically demanding. UNHCR has provided limited assistance to help meet basic needs of the Chin. Other significant contributors to help improve the material conditions of the Chin in New Delhi are the Chin community and Chin churches located in the United States, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand that are made up of Chin refugees from Myanmar/Burma. However, the needs are substantial.

⁶⁸ Wilch et al., *Seeking Refuge: The Chin People in Mizoram, India*

⁶⁹ Ibid.



Demonstrators requesting UNHCR to provide assistance and protection

E is a 19-year old Chin refugee who has been in New Delhi for ten years with her 52-year old mother. Due to her mother's ailing health and limited jobs that do not pay a living wage, E stopped going to school and started working at the age of 11 to help make ends meet. She has worked in a number of different low-paying jobs where she was treated poorly. More recently, E was able to get a job in a call center, however that work ended in March with the country wide lockdown that took place in India related to COVID-19 pandemic. E feels hopeless about the situation and experiences anxiety and depression. Her mother has chronic medical conditions and has accrued medical bills that remain outstanding. While neither E or her mother can work right now, they are falling behind on their rent and regularly skip meals because they can't afford food. She attempted to sell her household items in order to get by, but during this time no one is able to purchase such things. Thus, E borrowed money at a high interest rate. She worries what will happen to her and her mother if the situation in New Delhi does not improve.

Health

For Chins, access to affordable medical care in New Delhi is severely limited. The nearest government run hospital providing free or low-cost medical consultations, Deen Dayal Upadhyay (DDU), is more than five kilometers away, and is difficult to access, particularly in a medical emergency. Nearby private clinics are available to Chin refugees, although they are expensive. Another barrier to health care is that Chins do not trust certain providers' competence, including at DDU.

Moreover, difficult living conditions, discrimination, and dangerous working conditions have exacerbated the health needs of Chin refugees including health issues such as malnutrition, vitamin and calcium deficiencies, diarrhea and other stomach problems, hepatitis, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, malaria, and skin disorders.

UNHCR has provided medical care for Chins who are registered as refugees. Through the New Delhi Don Bosco Ashalayam (DBA), community service providers assist refugees with more complicated medical issues get connected to needed medical attention. UNHCR also provides a small subsistence allowance along with no-cost medications prescribed by the government hospitals. In 2005, UNHCR set up the Women's Protection Clinic providing language and culturally appropriate mental health care to Chin refugee women; however, the clinic is unfortunately no longer open.

N is a 17-year old girl who lives with her parents and three older brothers in New Delhi. One of her brothers suffers from a mental illness so her mother stays home to take care of him. Her father, in his 50's with an ongoing medical condition, goes house to house repairing electronic household items for which he earns 500 rupees per day (~ 5 USD). To help support the family, N quit school at the age of 14 and went to work at one of the banquet halls where many young Chins find jobs. At the banquet halls, she works from early evening until early the following morning. She is treated poorly, and often sexually harassed by her customers. She and the other girls are required to dress in revealing outfits and both boys and girls are told to do whatever their customers want, leaving them vulnerable to sexual harassment and mistreatment. N and her family struggle to make ends meet, and she is not alone as many young Chin face these same challenges, forgoing school to work in low wage jobs to support their families. N feels that her future, and the future of all young Chins, is compromised because they have to work instead and are unable to attend school.

Education

India, as a signatory state to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, has an international obligation to provide education to all children within the country. Further, a 2005 amendment to the Constitution of India institutes free and compulsory education to all children. Yet a majority of Chin children in New Delhi, even with residency permits, do not have access to education due to the inability to pay school fees and the limited availability of schools. In fact, as of August 2020, just 101 Chin children were enrolled in the schools in New Delhi. Those who have been able to attend school face the added challenge of language barriers as school instruction is usually in Hindi or English. More robust community supports for education previously existed, including educational support for Chin refugee children by the DBA, the New Delhi Young Men's Christian Association, and a Samaritan school for Chin children run by the Myanmar/Burma Mizo Community. However reduced resources caused these supports to shut down, leaving many Chin children behind.

As a result, many Chin refugee children in New Delhi obtain a primary school education or less, with few entering high school due to financial challenges and the need to work to help support the family. In lieu of education, Chin refugees in India often resort to working in the informal economy, often in harsh conditions and for low wages. For Chin refugee children who have had the opportunity to resettle in the United States, their disrupted educational opportunities abroad have made continuing education in their resettlement country extremely difficult. It has sometimes led them to forgo education altogether. One 17-year old, who quit school at age 13 to work, described the loss of educational opportunity, concluding that, "...our lives are getting spoiled."

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already dire economic conditions of the Chin refugees in New Delhi. Many Chin who were barely making ends meet prior to the pandemic are now completely out of work due to social distancing measures which have affected employment across the country. A recent assessment conducted with the Chin refugee community in New Delhi found the impact of COVID-19 disproportionately impacts their livelihoods.⁷⁰ As Chin refugees were already struggling to survive in New Delhi, their economic insecurity is exacerbated due to the pandemic. Detailed accounts indicated significant income loss leaving them in dismal circumstances where they struggle to meet their basic needs, such as food and housing.⁷¹ Many have fallen behind on rent and some of have been evicted. Refugees from Myanmar/Burma can barely survive on the rations provided to them from UNHCR or other community organizations, and almost 40% of participants in the assessment indicated that household members skip meals regularly so others in their household can eat with 91% of survey respondents reporting no

⁷⁰ Chin Refugee Committee, (June 2020), Rapid situation assessment of the impact of the covid-19 epidemic related lock-down on the Chin refugee community in New Delhi

⁷¹ Ibid

income in the previous four months.⁷²

The pandemic has also impacted those with pre-existing health conditions. Prior to the pandemic they struggled to afford and access medical care, and now with more limited income their medical debts are increasing. They also face further difficulties accessing medical care due to travel restrictions. Significant delays in COVID-19 testing and treatment have also caused serious complications, especially for those who tested positive and who are expected to quarantine. Such experiences have led to mental health concerns that impact their day-to-day functioning such as difficulty sleeping, feeling depressed and hopeless, and worrying about their future.

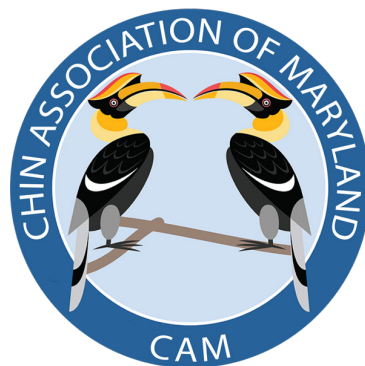
VIII. Conclusion

Chins and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma face serious protection and humanitarian issues in Malaysia and in New Delhi, India that illustrate that local integration is not a viable durable solution for most Chins in those refugee host communities. With violence in Chin State and the ongoing pattern by the Myanmar/Burma military of religious and ethnic persecution, voluntary repatriation is also not a viable option for Chins. Our recommendations include a call for policymakers to improve protection and humanitarian support. We also urge an increase in pursuing the durable solution of U.S. resettlement for Chins and other refugees from Myanmar/Burma. We urge this as part of expressing U.S. commitment to religious freedom and also as part of restoring overall U.S. commitment and leadership to refugee resettlement.

72 Chin Refugee Committee, (June 2020), Rapid situation assessment of the impact of the covid-19 epidemic related lockdown on the Chin refugee community in New Delhi



Chin refugees receiving community medical assistance in Malaysia



Chin Association of Maryland, Inc.

For information, contact: info@chinmd.org www.chinmd.org



UNSAFE: Chin Seeking Refuge in Malaysia and New Delhi, India

Report of Chin Association of Maryland

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