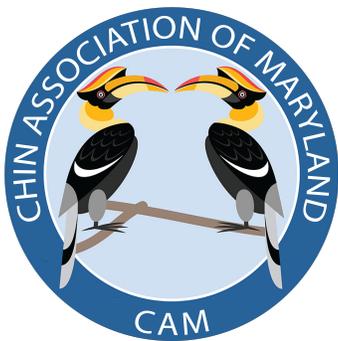


Chin Refugees in India's Mizoram State: Helping the Refugees and Supporting the Local Communities Welcoming Them



**Chin Association
of Maryland, Inc.**

June 2023





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Cover photos:

Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thaizawl, Lunglei District
Photos by CAM delegation

About CAM

The Chin Association of Maryland, Inc. (CAM) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Ellicott City, Maryland, with an office in Washington, DC. CAM empowers Chin communities in Maryland to successfully integrate into American society. CAM also advocates for protection, humanitarian assistance, and durable solutions for Chin and other refugees and internally displaced persons, and for religious freedom and human rights in Burma.

This is CAM's fourth report since the military coup. CAM's other reports since the coup include *After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenges for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees (October 2021)*; *Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region (June 2022)*; and *Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma (January 2023)*; CAM's two reports just prior to the coup were *Unprotected: Chin IDPs in Chin State and Rakhine State (September 2020)* and *Unsafe: Chin Refugees in Malaysia and New Delhi, India (September 2020)*.⁴ Also, in December 2011, Zo Tum Hmung, Matthew Wilch, Jenny Yang, and Stephen Ruben did a report on Chin refugees in Mizoram called *Seeking Refuge: The Chins in Mizoram State, India*.⁵

Chins, over eighty-five percent of whom are Christians, are an ethnic nationality from Burma.⁶ They are one of the major refugee groups that fled from Burma to neighboring countries to escape ethnic, religious and political persecution by the Burmese military since 1962. In 2001, about 1,000 Chin asylees came to the United States through Guam, resettling largely in Maryland, Indiana, Florida, and Texas. Since 2002, the United States has resettled many more Chin refugees coming through Malaysia and India. Chins now number an estimated 70,000 across the United States, with about 5,000 making Maryland their home.

Zo Tum Hmung is CAM's Executive Director. He previously co-founded and served as the first Executive Director of the Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center-Union of Burma (ENAC), a research center that supports the peace process and development of democratic institutions in Burma. Mr. Hmung completed his Master in Public Administration from Harvard University's Kennedy School, focusing on foreign policy and negotiations, and also finished his Master of Theological Studies with a concentration in Christian Faith and Public Policy from Eastern University's Palmer Seminary. He was born in Chin State, Burma, and currently lives with his family in Ellicott City, Maryland.

Reverend Timothy Siemens is CAM's Board Chairman. He graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1985 and has spent the last 34 years on staff with Grace Community Church in a variety of roles. Before his retirement in May 2019, he also served as an elder.

John Indergaard, Advocacy and Project Coordinator and a past CAM intern, completed his Master of Science in Foreign Service at Georgetown University's Walsh School in May 2023. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Government, with a Minor in International Relations, from Cornell University.

Matthew Wilch, Advisor, has been serving in a voluntary capacity. He is retired after a career advocating for immigrants and refugees, most recently serving as the Refugee Policy Advisor for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He received his Bachelor of Arts in English from Saint John's University (MN), and his Juris Doctor from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Arizona State University.

1 CAM Reports, <https://chinmd.org/reports-2/>

2 Seeking Refuge: The Chins in Mizoram State, India, December 2011, <https://chinmd.org/reports-2/>

3 Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2014 Myanmar Census Atlas: 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2016, p 26, https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Chin Association of Maryland (CAM) is grateful to Reverend Timothy Siemens, Board Chair, and to Matthew Wilch, Advisor, for joining Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director, on the trip to New Delhi and Mizoram, India, from March 10 to March 24, 2023.

CAM is grateful to Matthew Wilch for writing this report and to John Indergaard for assisting in editing it.

CAM thanks all those who took time to meet with us in India. This includes the Members of Parliament (MPs) from Chin State, the Chin refugees at the Trade Center Camp, Kanan Veng, Lawngtlai, and at the Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thaizawl, Lunglei. It also includes the refugee leaders in New Delhi, Aizawl, Lawngtlai, and Siaha.

CAM is grateful to the Mizoram NGOs for meeting with us, including Central Young Mizo Association (Central YMA), Central Young Lai Association (Central YLA), and the Mara Thyutlia Py (MTP). CAM thanks Samagra Shiksha, as well, for meeting with us.

CAM thanks religious leaders who took time to meet. These included Reverend Dr. C. Chawngmingliana, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod, leader of the largest Christian denomination in Mizoram, and Chair of the Mizoram Kohhran Hrualtute Committee [Mizoram Church Leaders Committee]. It also included Reverend Bawitlung Zazawna Lai, the General Secretary of the Lairam Jesus Christ Baptist Church (LIKBK).

CAM is grateful to state and district government officials who met with us. This included Zoramthanga, Chief Minister (CM), of Mizoram, and Lalchhandama Ralte, the Minister of Education. It included Lalrinliana Sailo, the Speaker of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly, and Lalsawta, the President of the Congress Party of Mizoram. It included R. Vanramchhuanga, the Vice President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Mizoram, and M. Laikaw, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Mara Autonomous District Council, Siaha District, who is a member of BJP of Mizoram.

CAM thanks officials from the U.S. Embassy-New Delhi and from UNHCR-New Delhi who met with us.

We at CAM have tried our best to describe and analyze in good faith all the information that we received from many stakeholders about the humanitarian situation for Chin and other refugees in Mizoram State, India, and about the local Mizoram communities that are welcoming them. However, if we have inadvertently made any errors in this report, they are our own.

Zo Tum Hmung
Executive Director

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the CAM delegation's trip to New Delhi, India, and to Mizoram State, India, from March 10 to March 24, 2023.

It comes from CAM delegation meetings with Chin refugees in Aizawl, Lawngtlai, Siaha, and Lunglei. The information comes from visiting three refugee sites in Mizoram for Chins and other refugees from Burma: the living space for members of Parliament (MPs) from Chin State; the Trade Center Camp, Kanan Veng, Lawngtlai; and the Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thaizawl, Lunglei. The substance of the report likewise comes from the delegation's meetings with leaders of Mizoram NGOs, churches, and state and local government, and political parties.

Notes and materials obtained during these meetings were augmented with online materials as cited in footnotes. CAM has also produced three other reports since the February 1, 2021, military coup in Burma.⁴ These helped to inform the findings and recommendations of this report.

FOREWORD

As Speaker, it is my duty and honor to preside over the Mizoram Legislative Assembly (Assembly). On February 24, 2023, the Assembly had before it an important resolution. We adopted the resolution without objection. It concerned Mizoram's refugee response:

“The House commends the relief and reception rendered by the government and the people of Mizoram towards the refugees from the neighboring countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh and resolves to continue to provide shelter and other necessities in the future.”⁵

For the people of Mizoram, these refugees are our brothers and sisters. We are members of the same family. They are fleeing horrible circumstances and it is our responsibility to help them.

I welcome this report by the Chin Association of Maryland. It describes the challenges that the Chin and other refugees from Burma face and the challenges that our local communities face who welcome them.

I encourage everyone to continue our response to help our brothers and sisters with shelter and other necessities. Thank you.

Lalrinliana Sailo
Speaker
Mizoram Legislative Assembly

⁴ See CAM Reports, <https://chinmd.org/reports-2/>

⁵ This unofficial English translation of the resolution was provided to CAM by the Office of the Speaker of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly.

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6 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, p 3, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of May 1, 2023)

7 Seeking Refuge: The Chins in Mizoram State, India, December 2011, p 14, <https://chinmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Seeking-Refuge-The-Chin-People-in-Mizoram-State-India.pdf> (This map is derived with permission from Human Rights Watch (HRW) map of Chin State, Burma, and Mizoram State, India. Copyright 2008 John Emerson/HRW)

8 Mizoram Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 2020, p iv, <https://des.mizoram.gov.in/uploads/attachments/c17bbd8f-0cb516b82ae2583ec5701da0/pages-223-2020.pdf>

9 Ministry of Immigration and Population, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Chin State Report, Census Volume Report D-3, 2016, p. ii, https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Chin%20State%20Census%20Report%20-%20ENGLISH_0.pdf

10 Ministry of Immigration and Population, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Chin State Report, Census Volume Report D-3, 2016, p i, https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Chin%20State%20Census%20Report%20-%20ENGLISH_0.pdf

11 Government of India, Survey of India, Department of Science and Technology, Political Map of India, English 10th Edition, 2020, <https://surveyofindia.gov.in/pages/political-map-of-india>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director, Chin Association of Maryland (CAM), Reverend Timothy Siemens, Board Chair, and Matthew Wilch, Advisor, travelled to India from March 10, 2023, to March 24, 2023.

The mission of CAM's trip and the follow-up is a humanitarian mission:

1. To better understand the humanitarian needs of Chin and other refugees fleeing from Burma to Mizoram State, India: shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, healthcare (physical and psycho-social) and attention to the most vulnerable (at-risk women and children; people who are elderly, seriously ill, or disabled).
2. To better understand the responsibilities that the Mizoram government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), churches, and the local communities are taking on to help the Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram.
3. To advocate with the U.S. government, and with UNHCR, and other relevant UN agencies, and other humanitarian organizations and civil society to help the Chin and other refugees from Burma and to support the local Mizoram communities welcoming them.

Regarding the humanitarian mission, the CAM delegation repeatedly emphasized with the Chin refugee community in India that the mission of the trip concerned humanitarian needs, not durable solutions such as resettlement. In New Delhi, the CAM delegation met with the Chin Refugee Committee-New Delhi (CRC-New Delhi). One of CRC-New Delhi's major concerns was the difficulty of attaining an exit permit from India, an obstacle to third-country resettlement. The CAM delegation wished them well as they advocate on this important matter but emphasized that CAM's mission on the trip is focused on humanitarian needs and humanitarian solutions, not on the durable solutions for Chin refugees, such as resettlement.

The CAM delegation moved on to Mizoram where they met with Chin refugees in Aizawl, Lawngtlai, Siaha, and Lunglei. They visited three sites for Chin and other refugees from Burma: one for members of Parliament from Chin State; the Trade Center Camp, Kanan Veng, Lawngtlai; and the Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thazawl, Lunglei.

The delegation visited Mizoram NGOs, including Central Young Mizo Association (Central YMA),



The Trade Center Camp in Lawngtlai District, Mizoram, India. Photo by CAM Delegation.

Central Young Lai Association (Central YLA), and the Mara Thyutlia Py (MTP). The CAM delegation also met with the state implementing society, Samagra Shiksha, created by the Indian government to improve education throughout India, including in Mizoram.

The CAM delegation met with religious leaders, including Reverend Dr. C. Chawngmingliana, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod, leader of the largest church in the state. The Moderator also chairs the Mizoram Kohhran Hrualtute Committee [Mizoram Church Leaders Committee]. The delegation also met with Reverend Bawitlung Zazawna Lai, the General Secretary of the Lairam Jesus Christ Baptist Church (LIKBK).

The CAM delegation met with political leaders, including Zoramthanga, Chief Minister (CM) of Mizoram; Lalchhandama Ralte, the Minister of Education; Lalrinliana Sailo, the Speaker of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly; Lalsawta, the President of the Congress Party of Mizoram; R. Vanramchhuanga, the Vice President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Mizoram; and M. Laikaw, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Mara Autonomous District Council, Siaha District, who is a member of BJP of Mizoram.

The Chin refugees are working hard to organize themselves. The Mizoram government, NGOs, and churches are welcoming the Chins as brothers and sisters. Despite all the positive aspects to the situation for Chins and other refugees from Burma, there are limited resources in Mizoram. There are across-the-board, basic needs that are not being met.

Stakeholders described the need to move beyond a reactive, underfunded, emergency response to a humanitarian approach that is more planned, sufficiently funded, and sustainable and that will leave both the Chin and other refugees from Burma and the local Mizoram communities welcoming them better off. In other words, they described the need for a reset.

This report shares findings about the refugee and IDP crisis on the India Burma border. It describes how the stakeholders in Mizoram are trying to discern and navigate during this challenging moment and offers recommendations for building on their good work and further strengthening the efforts. The report likewise urges that the dire humanitarian needs of IDPs and others be addressed in western Burma—for the sake of those in need and for the sake of India.

FINDINGS

- The crisis for Chins in Chin State is worsening; the crisis in Mizoram for Chins and other refugees from Burma will continue and worsen for the foreseeable future.¹²
- Since the February 1, 2021, Burmese military coup:
 - Chin and other refugees who have fled Burma for India total an estimated 53,500, with 40,150 residing in Mizoram, 8,250 residing in Manipur, and 5,092 presenting themselves for registration in New Delhi.¹³
 - Chin and other refugees from Burma residing in Mizoram, by district, include Siaha 8,500; Lawngtlai 5,950; Hnahthial 1,200; Lunglei 2,100; Champhai 10,250; Aizawl 10,000; and other Mizoram districts 1,750.¹⁴
 - IDPs in Burma total 48,700 in Chin State, 763,100 in Sagaing Region, and 195,700 in Magway Region (both border Chin State).¹⁵
- The push factors causing the international migration of people from Burma to India and other neighboring countries is the Tatmadaw's violent campaign across Burma and the lack of access to protection and humanitarian assistance for IDPs and others in need in Burma.
- Chin refugees in Mizoram are organizing to be empowered, resilient, and self-sufficient.
- Mizoram NGOs, churches, and government officials welcome Chins as brothers and sisters.
- Nonetheless, Chin and other refugees from Burma have dire, across-the-board needs that are not met.
- Mizoram government, NGOs and churches view this as a crucial moment for a reset to the humanitarian response to Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram.
- There is a strong foundation to build on in Mizoram State, India, to strengthen the humanitarian response to the Chin and other refugees from Burma.

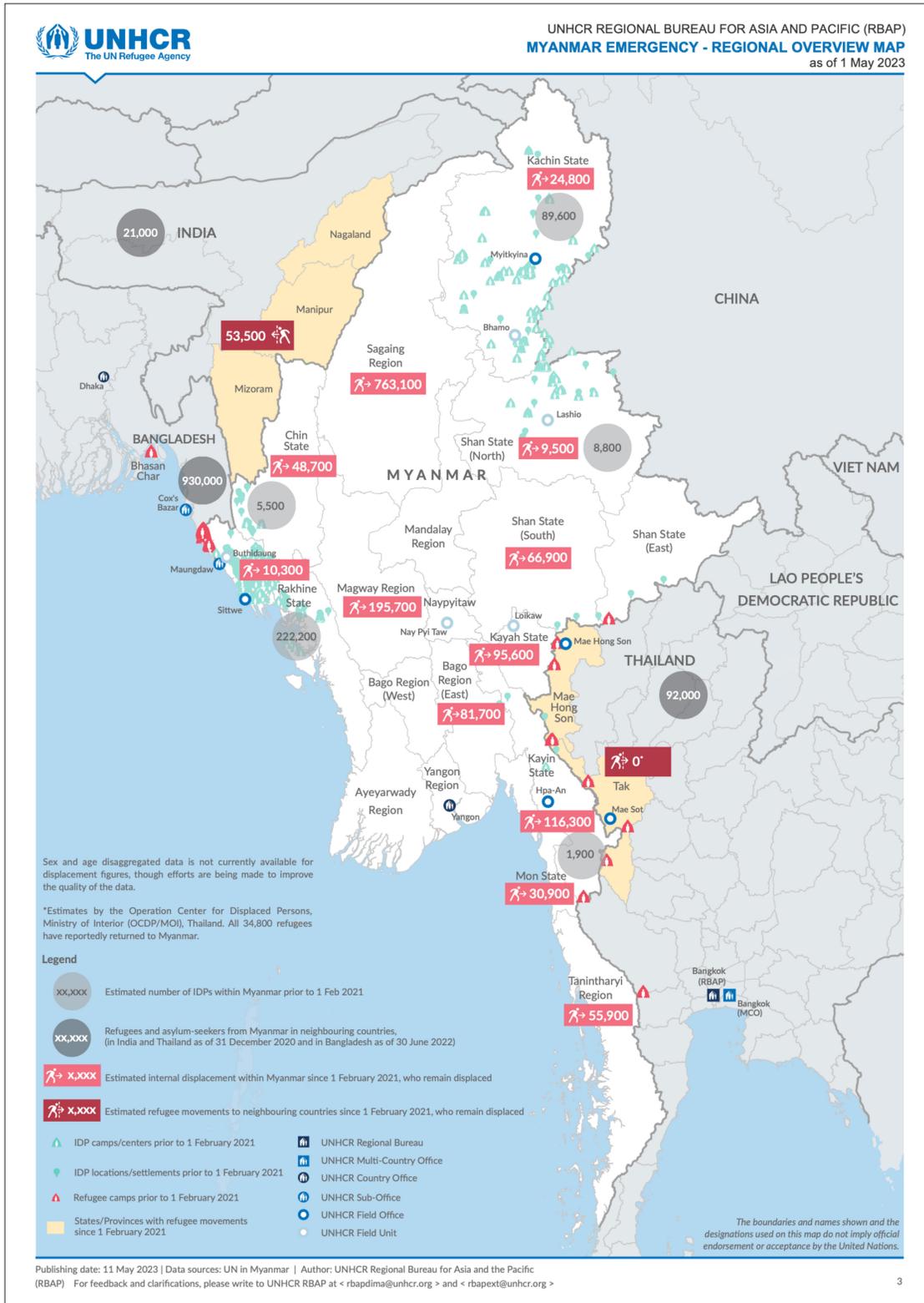
12 CAM detailed the worsening situation in a recent report. CAM, Two Years after the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians across Burma, January 2023, <https://chinmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf>. Also see Chin Human Rights Organization,

13 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of May 1, 2023)

14 Central YMA provided CAM with the estimated number of Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram by district, as of April 30, 2023. The district figures total 39,750 in Mizoram.

15 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of May 1, 2023)

Overview Map of Forcibly Displaced People from Burma: IDPs in Burma and Refugees in Neighboring Countries¹⁶



16 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, p 3, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of May 1, 2023)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to Mizoram NGOs, Churches, and Government

- To Mizoram government, NGO, and church stakeholders, continue welcoming Chin and other refugees from Burma as brothers and sisters, advocating for protection and humanitarian support, and serving collaboratively, effectively, and efficiently to help the refugees and support the local communities welcoming them.
- To Mizoram NGOs and churches, advocate for access to funding that will enable them to continue helping the Chin and other refugees from Burma while supporting the local communities welcoming them.
- To the Mizoram government, continue advocating with the India Central Government asking them to allow increased protection and humanitarian space to help Chins and others from Burma seeking refuge in Mizoram and to support the local Mizoram communities welcoming them.
- To the Mizoram government, advocate with the India Central Government to allow UNHCR, and other relevant UN agencies, and the United States and other friends of India to work closely with Mizoram to provide funding and technical assistance that responds to the needs of the Chin and other refugees from Burma and that supports the local Mizoram communities welcoming them.
- To the Nongovernmental Organization Coordinating Committee of Mizoram (NCC), advocate with the India Central Government to allow the UN agencies including UNHCR, other relevant UN agencies, and other humanitarian agencies to help Chin and other refugees from Burma and the local Mizoram communities welcoming them.
- To relevant Mizoram government, NGO, church and other stakeholders engaged in education, form a state educational working group for Mizoram to identify and meet the needs of the Chin and other refugee children and of the local children of Mizoram across the state.
- To Mizoram government, NGO, and church stakeholders, work together to develop a state refugee policy and state refugee plan that will help Chins and others from Burma seeking refuge in Mizoram and support the local communities welcoming them.

Recommendations to the Chin Refugee Community in Mizoram

- Remember what St. Paul said in Romans 8: 38-39 that nothing “will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.”¹⁷
- Continue to support and help one another to be empowered, resilient, and self-sufficient.
- Build good relationships with your Mizoram brothers and sisters.
- Cooperate with the Chin refugee committees so they will be able to carry out their important work in Mizoram.
- Engage with the programs of the Mizoram NGOs and churches to improve the quality of life.
- Avoid involvement in campaign politics during the Mizoram election season this year.
- Avoid involvement in illegal or harmful activities.

Recommendations to Chin refugee leaders in Mizoram

- Continue to organize local, district and statewide refugee committees to help identify needs, identify solutions, and work constructively with the Mizoram community.
- Plan and collaborate to build consensus about what policy and advocacy is needed and with whom, about what needs the community has and what solutions will meet those needs, and advocate to enable stakeholders covering different sectors and locations to carry out the advocacy and service in a coordinated, effective, and efficient manner.
- Coordinate and collaborate with the Mizoram government, Mizoram NGOs, and others who are helping the Chins and other refugees from Burma and the communities welcoming them.
- Seek technical assistance from NGOs in Mizoram.

Recommendations to the Chin Community

- Support Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram and Chin and other IDPs in Burma.
- Collaborate with Mizoram NGOs, churches, and other stakeholders.
- Establish a roundtable mechanism to help understand and meet the needs of Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram.

¹⁷ “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8: 38-39 (NIV).

- Advocate with the U.S. Administration and Congress
 - To urge India to allow space for international protection and humanitarian assistance for Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram, including access for UNHCR and other relevant UN agencies and their partners to be present in Mizoram.
 - To fund strengthened protection and humanitarian assistance for refugees in Mizoram.
 - To fund strengthened protection and humanitarian assistance for IDPs, including through strong presence in Chin State of UNHCR and other relevant UN agencies and humanitarian agencies.
 - To urge cross border humanitarian assistance across the India-Burma border to help protect and assist IDPs and others with humanitarian needs in Chin State, Sagaing Region, Magway Region, and other nearby areas.

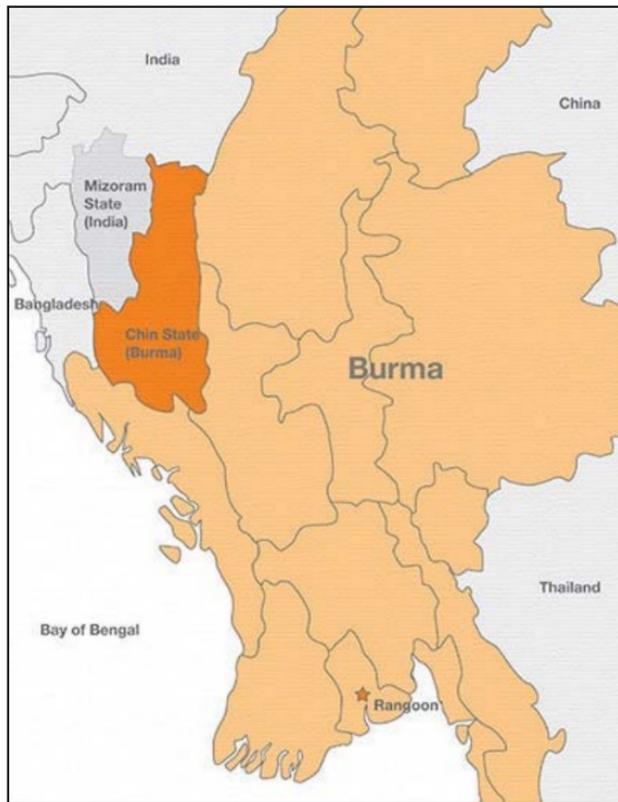
***Recommendations to the
U.S. Administration and to Congress***

- Engage more with India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the UN, and concerned nations to apply diplomatic, political, and economic pressure on the State Administration Council (SAC)
 - To stop their violence throughout Burma.
 - To release from prison elected officials, church officials, and other political prisoners detained after the Burmese military coup.
 - To enable the creation of a federal democratic union in Burma.
- Engage with India, ASEAN, the UN and concerned nations
 - To strengthen protection space for Chin and other refugees in Mizoram by allowing the presence in Mizoram of UNHCR, other relevant UN agencies and humanitarian agencies.
 - To allow UNHCR, other relevant UN agencies and humanitarian agencies to have strengthened presence in Chin State and to have unhindered access to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to Chins and others in need.
 - To allow unhindered access to cross-border humanitarian aid across the Thai-Burma and India-Burma borders to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to IDPs and others in need in Chin State, Sagaing Region, Magway Region and nearby areas.
- Increase funding to PRM, USAID, and UNHCR and other relevant UN agencies, enabling them to address the growing refugee crisis in Mizoram and northeastern India:

***Recommendations to UNHCR
and Other Relevant UN Agencies***

- Urge India to provide funds for the humanitarian crisis in Mizoram and northeast India.
- Urge India to allow access to Mizoram by UNHCR, and other relevant UN agencies, and other humanitarian agencies, enabling them to provide funding and technical assistance to sufficiently meet the humanitarian needs of Chin and other refugees from Burma and to support the local communities welcoming them.
- Coordinate with the U.S. State Department, USAID and other donors, urging them to provide funds to help address the growing humanitarian crisis of the Chins and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram State and the northeast while supporting the local communities welcoming them.
- Ensure that UNHCR and/or UNICEF engage with the public and private school officials of the governmental, and nongovernmental education sector in Mizoram to establish an educational working group to help optimize the educational environment for the refugee children from Burma and for the local students from Mizoram.
- Advocate with the U.S. government and other member states to provide more funding and better access for UNHCR and other relevant UN agencies and humanitarian agencies to enable the agencies to have a stronger presence in Chin State and to provide increased protection and humanitarian assistance for the Chin and other IDPs from Burma.

Map of Chin State, Burma, and Mizoram State, India¹⁸



¹⁸ Seeking Refuge: The Chins in Mizoram State, India, p 14, December 2011, <https://chinmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Seeking-Refuge-The-Chin-People-in-Mizoram-State-India.pdf> (This map is derived with permission from Human Rights Watch (HRW) map of Chin State, Burma, and Mizoram State, India. Copyright 2008 John Emerson/HRW)

BACKGROUND

Root Causes of the refugee crisis in Mizoram. The Burmese military, also known as the Tatmadaw, and its governing political body, the State Administration Council (SAC), overthrew the democratically-elected government of Burma on February 1, 2021. SAC did not stop after the coup. As documented in the Chin Human Rights Organization report that was published six months after the coup—*A Reign of Terror: SAC's Attack on life and property*—the Tatmadaw committed many atrocities in Chin State and northwestern Burma shortly after the coup.¹⁹

As CAM detailed in its recent report—*Two Years after the Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians across Burma*, in January 2023—the Tatmadaw continues to wreak havoc in its own countryside, including in the northwestern states and regions of Burma.²⁰ In Chin State and in Sagaing and Magway Regions and other states and regions, it carries out heavy ground assaults and is now escalating its airstrikes. The Tatmadaw is targeting ethnic and religious minorities, burning down towns, razing churches, destroying hospitals and clinics, giving religious leaders long prison sentences and university students the death penalty, and killing many civilians, including pastors.²¹

As CAM noted in its October 2021 report *After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenges for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees*, the Tatmadaw's violence causes humanitarian hardship, including forced displacement both internally and across international borders.²²

¹⁹ Chin Human Rights Organization, *Reign of Terror: SAC Junta Attacks on Lives and Properties in Chin State*, August/September 2021, <https://www.chinhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Reign-of-Terror-ReportCHRO-1.pdf>

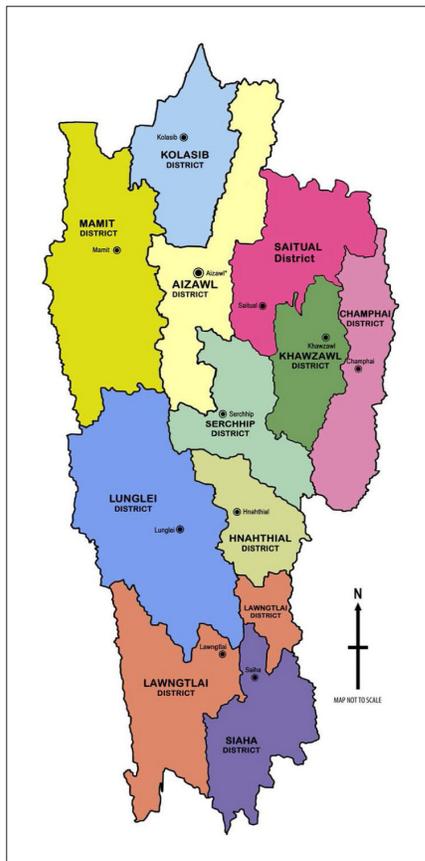
²⁰ CAM, *Two Years after the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians across Burma*, January 2023, <https://chinmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf>

²¹ CAM, *Two Years after the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians across Burma*, January 2023, <https://chinmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf>

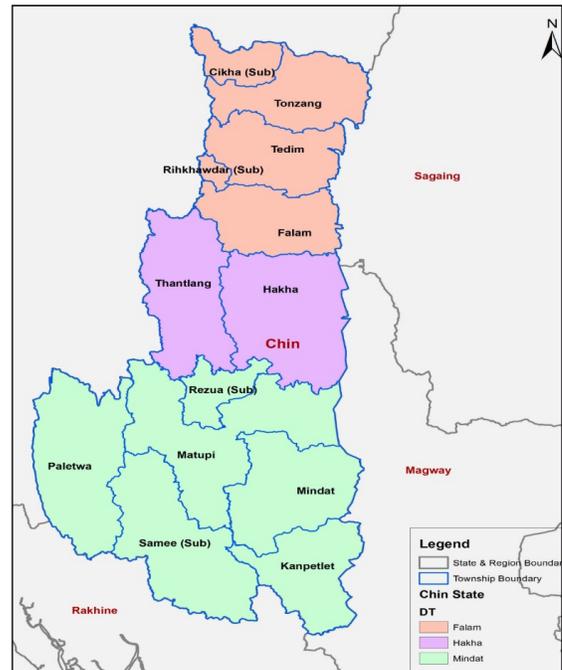
²² CAM, *After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenges for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees*, October 2021, <https://chinmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/After-the-2021-Military-Coup-in-MyanmarBurma.pdf>

Indeed, the Burmese military's violence has caused substantial international displacement. Since SAC's military coup of February 1, 2021, Chin and other refugees who have fled Burma for India total an estimated 53,500, with 40,150 residing in Mizoram, 8,250 residing in Manipur, and 5,092 presenting themselves for registration in New Delhi.²³ Since SAC's military coup, the population of Chin and other refugees from Burma seeking refuge in Mizoram's 11 districts numbers: 8,500 in Siaha; 5,950 in Lawngtlai; 1,200 in Hnahthial; 2,100 in Lunglei; 10,250 in Champhai; 10,000 in Aizawl; and 1,750 in Mizoram's other districts.²⁴

Map by District of Mizoram State, India²⁵



Map of Chin State, Burma, By Township²⁶



23 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of May 1, 2023)
 24 Central YMA provided CAM with the estimated number of Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram by district, as of April 30, 2023. The district figures total 39,750 in Mizoram.
 25 Mizoram Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 2020, p. iv, <https://des.mizoram.gov.in/uploads/attachments/c17bbd8f-0cb516b82ae2583ec5701da0/pages-223-2020.pdf>
 26 Ministry of Immigration and Population, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Chin State Report, Census Volume Report D-3, 2016, p. ii, https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Chin%20State%20Census%20Report%20-%20ENGLISH_0.pdf

Unfortunately, internal displacement inside Chin State and across Burma is likewise substantial and expanding at an alarming rate. Chin State has an estimated 48,700 internally displaced persons (IDPs); further, there are over 763,100 IDPs of multiple ethnicities in Sagaing Region, and 195,700 in Magway Region, which both border Chin State, Burma.²⁷ There could be an orderly, peaceful resolution to the humanitarian and IDP crisis in Burma and the crisis of refugees from Burma in neighboring countries. It could begin with the SAC halting its violent campaign across Burma, releasing imprisoned elected political leaders, church leaders and others, and allowing the establishment of a federal democratic union in Burma. That would require more concerted pressure from the international community.

Map of Myanmar by States, Regions, and Districts²⁸



27 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Myanmar Emergency Update, May 11, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of May 1, 2023)

28 Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Chin State Report, Census Volume Report D-3, p i, https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Chin%20State%20Census%20Report%20-%20ENGLISH_0.pdf

MIZORAM WELCOMES CHIN REFUGEES AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The Mizoram NGOs, churches, and government officials strongly support the Chin refugees. The CAM delegation found strong Mizoram community support for the Chin refugees. The delegation repeatedly heard from Mizoram stakeholders that the Chins are “our brothers and sisters.” This message came from local Mizoram NGOs with whom the delegation met, including Central YMA, Central YLA, and MTP, and with Samagra Shiksha, the state implementing society to improve education. The delegation heard the same support from local churches, such as from Reverend Dr. C. Chawngmngliana, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod, the leader of the largest church in the state. He also chairs the Mizoram Kohhran Hrualtute Committee (MKHC) [Mizoram Church Leaders Committee]. Also from Reverend Bawitlung Zazawna Lai, the General Secretary of the Lairam Jesus Christ Baptist Church. For many NGOs and churches in Mizoram, the welcome of the Chins is rooted in the traditional value of Tlawmngaihna, translated by Central YMA as “helping others at the cost of oneself.”²⁹

State and district political officials from multiple parties are supportive of the refugees from Burma. For example, from the ruling Mizoram National Front (MNF), Zoramthanga, the Chief Minister, has advocated with the Central Government for the people fleeing from Burma to be treated like refugees and not to be treated like undocumented aliens. Also, he and Lalrinliana Sailo, the Speaker of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly, were instrumental in securing the passage of a legislative resolution supporting Mizoram’s continued welcome of Chin refugees. The resolution was introduced by a member of the Congress Party and was also supported by the President of the Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM). Also, pursuant to Indian law, the Mizoram government allows Chin and other refugee children in India to be enrolled in school.³⁰

29 See YMA Profile: Help for the Needy, Info & Publicity Subcommittee Central YMA, p. 15 (Central YMA Press, Aizawl, Mizoram).

30 This is required by Indian law. See Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE-Act 2009), Chapter 2(4), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/RTE_Section_wise_rationale_rev_0.pdf

When the CAM delegation met in Aizawl with Lalsawta, the President of the Congress Party of Mizoram, he expressed support for the Chins as brothers and sisters. When the delegation met with R. Vanramchhuanga, the BJP Vice President in Lawngtlai, he expressed support for the Chins. In Siaha, M. Laikaw, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Mara Autonomous District Council, a BJP member, expressed strong support for the Chin refugees in Siaha as brothers and sisters. Although Lalduhawma, the President of the ZPM, was unavailable to meet, Zo Tum Hmung thanked him for his support of the resolution via phone.

The resolution referred to the commendable “relief and reception” provided by the government and people of Mizoram. These included the following actions: 1) the Chins and other refugees from Burma have not been treated like undocumented aliens, that is, they have not been turned back at the border, arrested, detained, or deported; 2) the state has registered an estimated 30,000 of them and begun the process of handing out state identification cards; and 3) the government and the people of Mizoram, through NGOs and churches, have provided humanitarian assistance.

The House commends the relief and reception rendered by the government and the people of Mizoram towards the refugees from the neighboring countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh and resolves to continue to provide shelter and other necessities in the future.

Resolution of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly, February 24, 2023, passed without objection

Unofficial translation provided by the Office of the Speaker of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly

Chin refugees are organizing themselves in Mizoram. Chin refugee leaders in districts across Mizoram are organizing their local groups of refugees. They are working so that Chin and other refugees in Mizoram can be empowered, resilient, and self-sufficient, and be partners with the Mizoram community in the humanitarian response.

ACROSS-THE-BOARD NEEDS REMAIN UNMET

There is not enough money: “We have open arms and empty pockets.” Despite the generous response described above of the Mizoram State government, NGOs, and churches, there is not enough money to meet the needs of the Chin and other refugees from Burma and to support the local communities welcoming them.

Accompanying the unwavering support expressed by Mizoram stakeholders was their frank appraisal that they do not have sufficient resources across the board to meet the basic needs of the Chin and other refugees from Burma. One stakeholder said, “We are a small state,” noting that Mizoram’s population of only 1.2 million people is supporting over 40,000 Chin and other refugees from Burma. Another described the frustrating situation in more stark terms: “We have open arms and empty pockets.” Locals informed the CAM delegation that a significant number of people in Mizoram already live below the poverty level. Lawngtlai NGOs said that over one third of Lawngtlai’s population lives below the poverty level (BPL).³¹ In other words, many Mizoram locals face the same humanitarian challenges that the Chins and other refugees from Burma face.

31 The Lawngtlai District website says that there are 117,000 people in the district and that 37.4% of the households in the district are BPL. Lawngtlai District, “About the District,” <https://lawngtlai.nic.in/about-district/>

Shelter. Numerous NGO and church stakeholders fear that the bamboo structures in the refugee camps in Mizoram will not provide safe, healthy shelter during the coming monsoon rains. While the delegation was in Mizoram, a sudden storm blew off the roof of one of the refugee shelters that the CAM delegation visited at the Trade Centre Camp, Kanan Veng, Lawngtlai, exposing the family inside to the harsh weather. Others said the shelters are temporary and not meant to last more than a year. They urged that there be construction of more durable shelters, using timbers, tiles and zinc roofs. Meanwhile, another NGO suggests using at least 250-300 GSM plastic sheets for the roofing instead of the 50 GSM being used in some shelters. The temporary bamboo shelters lack electricity for light, heat, and cooking, leaving the Chin and other refugees from Burma to rely on firewood. Further, the church leaders urged that refugees in temporary shelters need blankets for the winter.

Also, many of the temporary shelters and camps are built on private land. So far, the private owners have allowed them to remain, but it makes matters uncertain for the refugees from Burma and for the time limits local landowners' use of the land for other things.

Some Chin and other refugees from Burma rely on rented apartments for their shelter; for example, in towns like Siaha, Lawngtlai, Lunglei, Aizawl, and Champhai. Because of the challenge of making a livelihood, refugees' ability to pay rent may not last for long, especially for those who have no relatives or supporters from the United States or other countries.

Food and Water. For many Chin and other refugees from Burma, there is limited access to food. Many are limited to rice, the few vegetables they can grow, and in some cases, raising a few chickens for meat and eggs. Many are dependent on food that comes from donations. One church that serves many refugees admitted that they could not provide even half of the food needed. Some refugees get occasional day work in construction, but wages are very low.

Others, such as those who are elderly, children, sick or disabled, are unable to support themselves. Securing sufficient clean water is also a challenge, especially in the summer and in rural areas of Mizoram, where the Chin refugee camps are located. To meet the food and water needs of refugees from Burma and the Mizoram community welcoming them, especially those who live below the poverty level, the state and district-level planning could address the challenges of feeding and providing water for both the refugees and the Mizoram locals. Some stakeholders noted that some possible solutions include various water harvesting schemes and possible diversion of water from a nearby river.

Livelihood. Many of the Chin refugees come from rural Chin State and are skilled at farming and animal husbandry. Unfortunately, there is insufficient land available for them to raise enough food for their families. With more resources, churches and NGOs envision very positive livelihood projects that could help both Chin and other refugees from Burma and also the Mizoram locals. These include gardening and agriculture, animal husbandry, weaving and handicrafts, and small shops. They also note that there are 1,500 to 2,000 Civil Disobedience Members (CDMers) among the refugees. These are civil servants from Burma who refused to work for the SAC after the coup. Many of them were teachers or have other advanced skills. Allowing them to fully engage these skills could benefit not only themselves but also other refugees and the local people from Mizoram.



Chin refugees at Trade Center Camp, Lawngtlai, rely on firewood. Photo by CAM delegation.

Health. A Chin doctor familiar with the refugees' health needs expressed concern to CAM about childhood diseases for refugee toddlers since most children in Burma have not had their childhood vaccinations since the February 1, 2021, military coup. Another stakeholder feared the increased risk for gender-based violence against women and children in certain shelters where numerous families are living together in the same space. Given the temporary nature of the refugees' shelter and shortage of clean water, there is also concern about mosquito borne and water borne diseases.

Reportedly, there has recently been improved access to treatment of infectious diseases and emergency care for the Chin and other refugees from Burma in southern Mizoram. However, local churches and NGOs report that there is still a lack of capacity in the community to treat chronic diseases, such as asthma, cancer, AIDs, hepatitis, diabetes, kidney failure, gynecological problems, etc. One of the local church medical facilities is absorbing many of those expenses for Chin and other refugees from Burma and cannot afford to continue doing so.

Many refugees have lost a great deal: their home, property, village, country, and often family members and friends, and their own good health. There are a high number of elderly people and children in the refugee population, including at least 40 unaccompanied children. Many of the young men and women have stayed behind to stand up to the Tatmadaw. One pastor said, "Old-aged people cry for missing their land...they really want to go back home." Parents are anxious about the well-being of their sons and daughters in Burma. Given these circumstances, there is a great need for spiritual care, psycho-social care, nurturing, and healing from trauma.

Education. Pursuant to Indian law, the Ministry of Education has enrolled at least 6,195 Chin and other refugee children into public schools and is providing them with school lunches.³² There are still costs that are not covered for uniforms, books, and supplies. One NGO estimated that costs for these items range from 1,000 R to 6,000 R per student. In addition, there are costs for transportation to schools. Another challenge is for college age, college bound young people who have fled to Mizoram. Most face financial obstacles applying for Mizoram colleges; most also need to take language classes in Mizo and English to succeed in Mizoram schools. They also will likely have financial difficulties paying for higher education.

At-risk refugees. As noted above, vulnerable groups include the elderly; at-risk women and children, including unaccompanied children and victims of gender-based violence; disabled people; victims of violence and trauma and other people with serious health issues.



(Left to Right) Matt Wilch, Zo Tum Hmung, Rev. Tim Siemens, CAM delegation; Rev. Dr. C. Chawngminglana, Moderator, Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod. Photo by CAM.

A RESET: BUILDING ON MIZORAM'S STRONG CHURCH AND NGO RESPONSE AND STRENGTHENING THE EFFORTS FURTHER

Building on India's capable and-generous policies and approaches to particular refugee groups, this could be a moment to reset to a planned, sufficiently funded, sustainable response to the humanitarian crisis. During the trip, stakeholders noted that although India is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention, it has had capable and generous policies and approaches to particular refugee groups. In this context, since Mizoram has been able to welcome the Chin refugees through their humanitarian response, perhaps Mizoram stakeholders might likewise be able to work together to develop a state policy and state plan related to the protection and humanitarian response to help the Chins and others from Burma seeking refuge in Mizoram and to support the communities welcoming them.

Such a state refugee plan and a state policy could help provide a blueprint for an effective, coordinated ongoing response to the temporary humanitarian crisis in Mizoram. The state government could be at the heart of the state policy and state plan, and the churches and nongovernmental organizations could be crucial partners. There are also some additional ways to help strengthen the humanitarian response to help the Chin and other refugees from Burma and support the local communities welcoming them.

With an estimated 40,150 Chin and other refugees from Burma in Mizoram and 53,500 in India,³³ and with the refugee crisis in the state moving into its third year, local stakeholders are working to move beyond a reactive, underfunded, emergency response to a more planned, sufficiently funded, sustainable response. This reset involves building up their own capacities as service providers, ministries, and NGOs.

32 This is required by Indian law. See Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE-Act 2009), Chapter 2(4), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/RTE_Section_wise_rationale_rev_0.pdf

33 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of 1 May 2023)



(Left to Right) Professor Malsawmliana, Assistant Secretary, Central YMA; Roneihthanga, Finance Secretary, Central YMA; Zo Tum Hmung, Rev. Timothy Siemens, Matthew Wilch, CAM Delegation; R. Lalngheta, President, Central YMA; and Fabian Lalfakawma, Central YMA. Photo by CAM Delegation.

As organizations, more technical assistance and resources would enable them to effectively assess needs, plan responses, secure sufficient resources, and carry out interventions that meet the needs of the refugees and of the local Mizoram communities welcoming them. As a group of governmental and nongovernmental organizations working together for a common cause, the approach would be to build a consensus about the path forward and to collaborate efficiently and effectively together.

Building on the strong, compassionate response of Mizoram churches. Mizoram's churches have played an important role in welcoming the Chin and other refugees who have fled Burma since the 2021 military coup. The largest church is the Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod. Reverend Dr. Reverend Dr. C. Chawngmingliana, Moderator, leads the church and also chairs the Mizoram Kohhran Hrualtu Committee (MKHC)³⁴ (Christian Denominational Leaders Committee). The continued support of the Moderator and other church leaders is vital to the ongoing success of the humanitarian effort.

Building on the strong leadership and commitment of the Mizoram NGOs. Central Young Mizo Association is a linchpin for the continued success of the humanitarian response. Central Young Mizo Association (Central YMA) has a strong influence over public opinion and politics throughout the state as it carries out an important role of maintaining unity of the various clans in Mizoram.³⁵ Central YMA leads the Mizoram NGO Coordinating Committee (NCC) which includes the following major Mizoram NGOs: Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) [Mizo Women's Association]; Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP) [Mizoram Senior Association]; and Mizo Student Union (MSU) and Mizo Zirlai Paul (MZP), which both represent Mizo students. The Committee members use the committee to coordinate activities on behalf of Mizoram, including their important advocacy related to the current humanitarian response to the Chin and other refugees from Burma.

³⁴ See Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee (MKHC) (Mizoram Churches Leader Committee)-<https://mizoramynod.org/page/780>

³⁵ The motto, values, activities, and structure of the Young Mizo Association (YMA) described in this section are from a Central YMA publication. YMA Profile: Help for the Needy, Info & Publicity Subcommittee Central YMA (Central YMA Press, Aizawl, Mizoram).

Central YMA values and has a large capacity for self-sacrifice and service, rooted in the Mizo tradition of “Tlawmngaihna” (“helping others at the cost of oneself”). It is a community-based NGO with 816 local branches in Mizoram, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura. With 767 of these branches in Mizoram alone, almost all towns and villages in the state have a YMA presence.

YMA local branches routinely carry out services. These include building houses for widows, recovering drowned bodies, preventing local wildfires, taking care of the physically and mentally challenged, being a backbone of government, responding to natural calamities, contributing to education, reforming social life, doing voluntary blood drives, controlling HIV/AIDS, doing famine relief work, ensuring fair elections, controlling drug trafficking, conserving forest and wildlife, and promoting sports.

Central YMA leaders all refer to the Chin refugees as their brothers and sisters. Since Chin and other refugees first started to arrive after February 1, 2021, Central YMA has been mobilizing to help meet their needs and the needs of the Mizoram communities welcoming them.

With more funding, Central YMA could help bolster the humanitarian efforts. Not only does Central YMA help Chin and other refugees from Burma and support local communities directly, but humanitarian stakeholders in Mizoram mentioned that Central YMA helps them to operate at the local level. Funding for Central YMA could come from the Central Government of India, from Mizoram State, or through some other humanitarian funder. Central YMA also could benefit from technical assistance to help build their organizational capacities. Increasing their capacity would also benefit ongoing emergency response capacity for the people of Mizoram.

Central YLA and MTP play similar important roles for Lawngtlai and Siaha Districts, that is, for areas represented by the Lai Autonomous Council and Mara Autonomous Council, respectively. Also strengthening their organizations and capacity would help the Chin and other refugees from Burma and strengthen the local Mizoram communities hosting them. The CAM delegation did not have the opportunity to meet with the other NCC members besides Central YMA.

The presence in Mizoram of UNHCR and other relevant UN agencies could strengthen the humanitarian response. India is not a signatory to the 1951 refugee convention. Nonetheless, under international law, India and all nations, whether signatories to the refugee convention or not, are still bound by the international norm of “nonrefoulement,” that is, that no nation can return someone back to a country where they will be persecuted or suffer similar irreparable harm.³⁶ A non-signatory nation—recognizing the “nonrefoulement” obligation shared by all nations—responds when people seek refuge on its territory. Non-signatory nations often turn to UNHCR to help them meet the refugees’ needs.

For example, UNHCR helps India’s neighbor Thailand to meet refugees’ needs. Thailand, like India, is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention. UNHCR explains how it helps Thailand, “...Myanmar refugees reside in nine temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border, while urban asylum-seekers, refugees, and stateless persons reside in different areas of the country. UNHCR works with the RTG [Royal Thai Government], international agencies, NGOs and donors to address the protection, assistance, and durable solutions needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons.”³⁷

UNHCR has field offices in Mae Hong Son and Mae Sot, Thailand, to work with refugees in the temporary shelters and an office in Bangkok to help refugees living in the city.³⁸

In India the Central Government allows UNHCR to help refugees in New Delhi. It sometimes allows UNHCR to operate outside of New Delhi to meet refugees’ needs. For example, UNHCR currently has a presence in Chennai in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. UNHCR could likewise have a presence in Aizawl in the Indian state of Mizoram.

36 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The principle of Nonrefoulement under international law,” <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf>

37 UNHCR, Fact Sheet Thailand, 31 December 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2023/01/MCO-Thailand_31-December-2022.pdf

38 UNHCR, Fact Sheet Thailand, 31 December 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/th/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2023/01/MCO-Thailand_31-December-2022.pdf

Concerning other UN agencies, UNICEF is already present in Assam, a neighboring state of Mizoram in northeast India.³⁹ UNICEF could be particularly helpful in assisting the local Mizoram community with funding and technical assistance to respond to the educational needs of the Chin and other refugee children and of the children from Mizoram's host communities. UNICEF could also be helpful in dealing with health needs. It also currently operates in Burma, which could be particularly helpful to inform responses to the psycho-social needs of the refugee children coming from that country.⁴⁰

The World Food Program (WFP) has been partnering with Meghalaya State, a neighboring state of Mizoram in northeast India.⁴¹ In India, the WFP is currently focusing on strengthening the public food distribution system, fortifying the food that is distributed, and doing food insecurity mapping, including of tribal groups.⁴² Such efforts that have already been taking place elsewhere in northeast India could be very helpful in the northeast Indian state of Mizoram.

Another key is to further strengthen educational opportunities for Chin refugee children and children from the local Mizoram communities.

The delegation views the Minister of Education, with support from Samagra Shiksha, the state implementing society established to improve education, to be the key leader to address the challenges in the education sector. NGOs and churches are also important partners in this effort. While Mizoram generously enrolls Chin and other refugee children to attend public schools, certain expenses are not covered, such as uniforms, books, and supplies. Also, there are sometimes challenges with transportation. Further, most Chin children are challenged because they do not speak Mizo or English, the languages of instruction in most Mizoram schools.

Chin parents are concerned that if their children attend school in Mizoram, they will lose their ability to read and write their native languages. Learning Mizo and English would help enable Chins to succeed in Mizoram; maintaining their native language would help enable Chins to succeed when they are able to return to Burma. It would be best for all involved if the children could be prepared for success on both sides of the border.

Notably, Lawngtlai and Siaha both have Autonomous Councils for the Lai and Mara ethnic populations living there. In the areas governed by those Autonomous Councils, the Councils, not the Mizoram State government, oversee the schools for grades 1 through 8. Thus, the native dialect in those schools will be Lai and Mara, which may very well correspond to the Chin refugee children's native dialects. In those schools, there will still be the important challenge of the Chin children being able to speak Mizo and English to be prepared for success in Mizoram.

In whatever circumstance, a continued robust response to the children's education will be an important investment. It will help to ensure protection for the children and education and training that will enable them to be self-sufficient in Mizoram and to rebuild a new Chin State and Burma when the time comes. Support from the Indian government would be very helpful in this area. Also, since this is an international humanitarian emergency, UNHCR and/or UNICEF, the U.S. State Department and other donors could also play a helpful supportive role to the Minister of Education and Samagra Shiksha and the Autonomous Councils.

The CAM delegation also suggests that an educational working group for Mizoram could be a helpful tool to identify and meet the needs of the Chin and other refugee children and local children across the state. This would cover issues related to children in public schools overseen by the state, and by the Lai and Mara Autonomous District Councils and private schools run by faith-based groups and others. The size, composition, and functioning of the committee would be up to those involved. Among the key stakeholders for education are the Mizoram Minister of Education and Samagra Shiksha, education officials from Lai and Mara Autonomous District Councils, and from the private school sector, Central YMA, Central YLA, MTP, and other NGOs working on education,

39 UNICEF, Children in Assam, <https://www.unicef.org/india/where-we-work/assam>

40 UNICEF, "Delivering for Children in Time of Crisis," <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/>

41 Shillong Today, "Meghalaya signed MOU with World Food Program to Improve targeting of Public Distribution System," March 22, 2022, <https://shillongtoday.com/meghalaya-signed-mou-with-the-world-food-programme-to-improve-the-targeted-public-distribution-system/>

42 World Food Program, "Where we Work/India: What the World Food Program is doing in India," <https://www.wfp.org/countries/india>

UNHCR and/or UNICEF, and relevant representatives from the Chin refugee communities. One resource that the education sector could benefit from in Mizoram is the group of Chin refugees who were teachers in Burma. Of the estimated 1,500 to 2,000 CDMers from Burma in Mizoram, many are teachers.

For university age and university bound Chin and other refugees needing admission to university, it is also important to work with Mizoram universities to help remove the financial, language, and other obstacles to admission. Their higher education will enable them to contribute more fully to Mizoram and to help build a new Burma when the time comes.

An important key to strengthening the humanitarian response is for stakeholders to work with Chin refugees. As noted above, Chins seeking refuge in Mizoram are organizing themselves so that they can be empowered, resilient, and self-sufficient. Engaging with them as partners in the humanitarian response is an important key to success. Chin refugees can work with Mizoram NGO, church, and government stakeholders to help identify community needs and community assets, and to help pursue solutions.



(Left to Right) Lalhmachhuana, State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha; Matt Wilch and Rev. Tim Siemens, CAM; Dr. Lalzirmawia Chhange, IAS, Secretary, School Education Department; Zo Tum Hmung, CAM; (Seated) Lalchhandama Ralte, Minister of State, School Education. Photo by CAM delegation.

ADDRESS THE PUSH FACTORS FROM BURMA

While Mizoram welcomes their Chin brothers and sisters, ideally the international community should be carrying out other needed activities related to the Burma humanitarian crisis. The 17.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside Burma make up nearly one third of the country's population,⁴³ and the over 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burma are greatly impacted by the crisis.⁴⁴ Most of those suffering humanitarian need and displacement are experiencing these hardships because of the Tatmadaw's violent campaign. Since it began after the 2021 military coup, nearly 1.5 million of the IDPs have been displaced by the Tatmadaw's violent campaign,⁴⁵ and the number of people needing humanitarian assistance in Burma has risen by 16.5 million.⁴⁶

The Burmese military's violent campaign is the number one factor creating humanitarian need in Burma, and the number one push factor displacing people and forcing many to flee from Burma as refugees. More concerted diplomatic, political, and economic pressure on SAC is needed by the UN, ASEAN, India, the United States and other nations. They need to urge SAC to halt their violent campaign across Burma, release political leaders, church leaders and other leaders, and allow Burma to build a federal, democratic union.

43 UN, "Deny Legitimacy of Myanmar's military junta, UN expert urges," January 31, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1133027>

44 OCHA, Myanmar Humanitarian Update, May 6, 2023 (IDPs and refugees since February 1, 2023), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100074>

45 OCHA, Myanmar Humanitarian Update, May 6, 2023 (IDPs and refugees since 1 February 2023), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100074>

46 UN, "Deny Legitimacy of Myanmar's military junta, UN expert urges," January 31, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1133027>

Relevant to the forced displacement and migration of Chins, there are at least 48,700 IDPs in Chin State.⁴⁷ One Chin community leader explained that there is a great incentive for the Chin civilians to remain in Chin State. The Chin people are in strong solidarity with one another to remain in Chin State to maintain their homeland, their freedom, and their faith. On the other hand, if their villages are warzones and if there is no access to lifesaving protection and humanitarian support for them in Chin State, including for those who are IDPs, they may be forced to flee to Mizoram to survive. Besides pressure on SAC, the international community committing to and investing in protection and humanitarian support for Chins in need of humanitarian aid, including IDPs, can help keep them from having to flee from Burma to become refugees in Mizoram. It can also help keep the refugee crisis in Mizoram and India from growing larger.

Making matters even more urgent for India, there are high numbers of IDPs in two regions in Burma bordering Chin State, with 763,100 IDPs in Sagaing Region and 195,700 in Magway Region.⁴⁸ Given these figures, an even larger flow of refugees could potentially occur if there is not a reduction in violence in Burma and increased access to lifesaving protection and humanitarian support for the IDPs in Chin State, Sagaing Region, and Magway Region and other states and regions. The worst-case scenario would rival the large number of Rohingya that the Tatmadaw forced to flee Burma in 2017.⁴⁹

Currently, there are numerous obstacles to getting protection and humanitarian aid to IDPs in Burma. These obstacles include ongoing Tatmadaw ground assaults and airstrikes as well as the Burmese military's restrictions on INGOs and IDPs. For example, the Burmese military ordered all INGOs to register and report to them monthly. They are also dictating the locations of the IDP camps. If IDPs settle in other areas, which some do, the Burmese military does not consider them to be IDPs. Many NGOs and IDPs do not trust the military. The Tatmadaw has caused the displacement of the IDPs. Also, it has reportedly killed INGO aid workers and stolen international humanitarian aid meant for the IDPs. Other challenges include lack of international humanitarian funding for the IDPs. UNHCR reports that international fundraising for Burma so far covers only 44% of the need.⁵⁰

Robust humanitarian support is needed for Chins in Chin State, including IDPs, and for other ethnic civilian populations, including IDPs in Sagaing Region and Magway Region. Without such support, the push factor could continue to increase and force the Chins in need of humanitarian assistance in Burma to become refugees in Mizoram State, India. The IDPs and those in dire humanitarian need in Sagaing Region, Magway Region, and other states and regions could likewise become refugees in India or other neighboring countries. The total number of IDPs in those three areas is over 1 million.

47 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (data as of May 1, 2023)

48 UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 11, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/4813> (report data is current as of May 1, 2023)

49 UNHCR, Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained, July 13, 2022, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/>

50 UNHCR, Funding Update 2023: Myanmar, April 27, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/index.php/myanmar-funding-2023>

In an earlier section, there was a discussion of UNHCR potentially being present in Mizoram. As noted, such presence could help provide refugee protection and assistance to Chin and other refugees from Burma. Similarly, UNHCR presence in Mae Hong Son and Mae Sot, Thailand, together with NGOs, helps to provide protection and humanitarian assistance for those in the Thai temporary shelters. But how does UNHCR's presence relate to the push and pull factors in this situation? As noted above, the major factors which lead IDPs in Burma to become refugees in India continue to be the push factors of the Tatmadaw's violent attacks against civilians and the challenge that civilians face, including IDPs, of finding safe shelter and sufficient humanitarian support in Burma. During the two years since the military coup, Mizoram NGOs indicate that there has been an ebb and flow of Chins and other refugees who come to Mizoram and then return to Chin State or nearby regions in Burma, corresponding to the changing level of violence.

Thus, CAM believes that the best approach is to pursue policies that reduce the push factors. International pressure on the Tatmadaw to halt their violence across Burma is crucial. Also crucial is the increased protection and humanitarian assistance to those in western Burma that could be achieved through a strong presence in Chin State of UNHCR, other relevant UN agencies, and humanitarian agencies. Also, CAM notes that cross-border humanitarian assistance across the Thai-Burma border has greatly helped people in eastern Burma for several decades. CAM urges the use of similar mechanisms on the India-Burma border to help relieve the human suffering in Chin State and other nearby areas in western Burma. CAM believes that such investments in protection and humanitarian assistance to IDPs would reduce the human suffering for those in need. It would also reduce the push factor causing India's migration crisis, since IDPs in western Burma whose basic needs are met are less likely to have to flee to India to seek refuge.

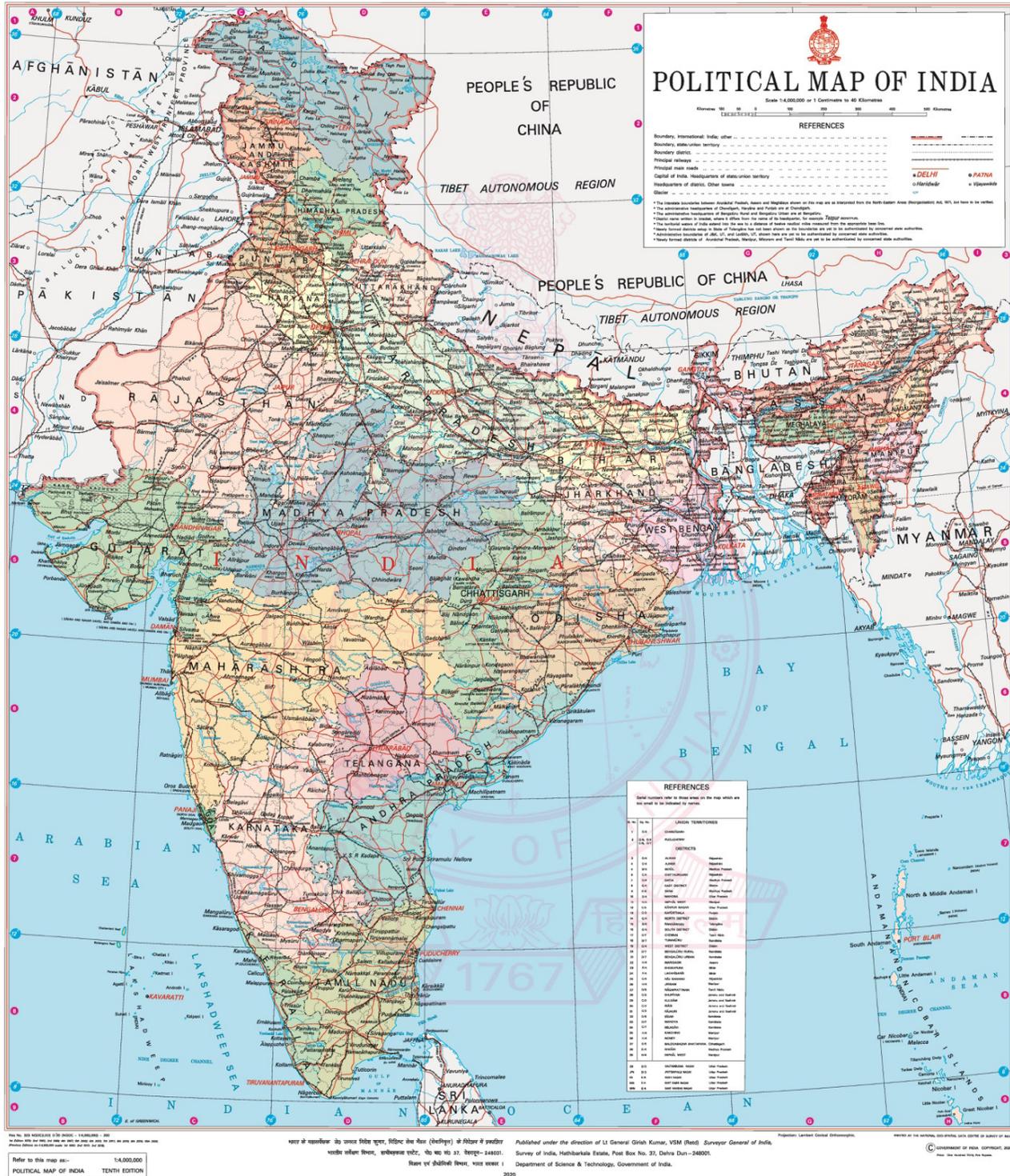


(Left to right) Zo Tum Hmung, CAM; Zoramthanga, Chief Minister of Mizoram; Rev. Tim Siemens; Matt Wilch, CAM



(Left to Right) Matt Wilch and Rev. Tim Siemens, CAM; Lalrinliana Sailo, Speaker of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly; Zo Tum Hmung, CAM.

Political Map of India With Surrounding Countries⁵¹



51 Government of India, Survey of India, Department of Science and Technology, Political Map of India, English 10th Edition, 2020, <https://surveyofindia.gov.in/pages/political-map-of-india>

CONCLUSION

With a worsening crisis in Chin State and Burma, this is a critical moment to carry out a reset to strengthen the protection and humanitarian response to help the Chin and other refugees from Burma and to support the local Mizoram communities welcoming them. There is a strong foundation to build on of capable and generous Indian policies and approaches for particular refugee groups. There is a strong foundation too of the compassion, commitment, and humanitarian experience of Mizoram government, churches, and NGOs. The presence in Mizoram of UNHCR and other relevant UN agencies could also strengthen the humanitarian response.

To avoid a larger refugee crisis, it is also vital that the international community put more concerted pressure on the SAC to stop its violent campaign across Burma, release political leaders, church leaders, and others from prison, and allow Burma to build a federal democratic union. Meanwhile, the international community should also work to strengthen the presence of UNHCR, other relevant UN agencies, and humanitarian agencies to provide protection and humanitarian assistance in Chin State. Cross-border assistance across the India-Burma border or comparable solutions should be implemented to help IDPs and others in dire need of humanitarian assistance in northwestern Burma, including in Chin State and Sagaing and Magway Regions. These measures could help to alleviate their suffering and make it more possible for them to remain safely in Burma. It could also help prevent a larger refugee crisis in Mizoram and in India.

AFTERWORD

The NGO Coordinating Committee (NCC)-- Central Young Mizo Association, Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (Mizoram Women's Association), Mizoram Upa Pawl, (Mizoram Senior Association), Mizo Student Union and Mizo Zirlai Paul (both Mizo student organizations)--welcomes this report by the Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). The report is about the humanitarian situation of Chin and other refugees from Myanmar seeking refuge in Mizoram and the challenges facing our local Mizoram communities welcoming them. .

The CAM report commends the generous welcome and support of the Mizoram government, churches, and non-governmental organizations. It also recognizes that Mizoram is a small state. It explains that since this is an urgent international emergency, it is urgently important that the international community helps the refugees and supports the communities welcoming them.

The NCC is committed to continue to work closely with one another, with the Mizoram government, churches, and others to continue providing shelter and necessities for our Chin brothers and sisters. We welcome others to join us in this humanitarian effort.

R. Lalngheta, President
Central Young Mizo Association

Ngurmawii Salio
Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl

Nghaklianmawia
Mizoram Upa Pawl

Samuel Zormthanpuia
Mizo Student Union

Lallnunmawia Pauth
Mizo Zirlai Pawl



(Seated in Center) M. Laikaw, Chief Executive Member, Mara Autonomous District Council, Siaha, Mizoram, with his Executive Members and the CAM delegation. Photos by CAM delegation.



(Left to Right) Zo Tum Hmung, CAM; Lalsawta, President, Congress Party of Mizoram; Rev. Tim Siemens, CAM; Matt Wilch, CAM. Photo by CAM delegation.



Myanmar Refugee Camp, Thazawl, Lunglei District, Mizoram, India. Photo by CAM delegation.



Bamboo shelter, Trade Center Camp, Lawngtlai District, Mizoram, India. Photo by CAM delegation.



Outdoor living space, Myanmar Refugee Camp. Photo by CAM delegation.



A garden, Myanmar Refugee Camp. Photo by CAM delegation.

