BURMA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

SHARING THE BURDEN: THE CASE FOR UNICEF, WFP, AND INGO PRESENCE IN MIZORAM

AND

FAITH UNDER FIRE: THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN CHIN STATE AND ACROSS BURMA

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INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

RULE OF LAW VIS-À-VIS GOVERNANCE AND POLITY IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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Organized by Mizoram State Legal Services Authority

In collaboration with Mizoram Political Science Association (MIPSA) and Department of Political Science, Govt. Aizawl College, Aizawl

Appreciation and Strengthening Partnerships

- Gratitude: Honored to receive a second invitation to present a paper on Refugees and Local Governance.
- About BRI: Based in Maryland near Washington, DC, focusing on religious freedom advocacy and humanitarian assistance in Burma.
- Past Engagements: Privileged to have hosted prominent leaders from Mizoram, including MP Vanlalvena, former Speaker Lalrinliana Sailo, CYMA leaders, and Pu Lalmuanpuia Punte.
- Academic Collaboration: Looking forward to strengthening relationships with academic professionals in Mizoram.
- Future Visit: BRI presenters hope to visit Mizoram during the Christmas season and meet the organizers in person.

Sharing the Burden: The Case for UNICEF, WFP, and INGO Presence in Mizoram

- **Misconception:** India has not signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, but this does not prevent UN agencies from operating in India.
- **Refugee definition:** People forced to flee their countries due to persecution, conflict, violence, or threats to their safety.
- **Religious persecution:** Religious persecution, including persecution of Christians, is one reason people have fled Burma to India and neighboring countries.
- **UNHCR presence:** UNHCR operates in New Delhi, providing refugee protection, assistance, and resettlement support.
- **International resettlement:** Eligible refugees may be resettled in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and European countries.
- **Humanitarian assistance:** UNHCR and partner organizations support refugees in India, while other humanitarian organizations assist displaced communities in states such as Mizoram.

Key message: India's nonparticipation in the Refugee Convention does not prevent UNHCR operations or international humanitarian assistance.

References:
Seeking Refuge: The Chin People in Mizoram State, India, p. 50.
BRI Report: Severe Violations of Religious Freedom Against Christians (2026)

BRI's Advocacy for International Humanitarian Assistance in Mizoram

- **BRI's mission:** Since changing its name from CAM to BRI, the organization has advocated for international humanitarian assistance for both Mizoram communities and Chin refugees.
- **U.S. advocacy:** BRI has raised humanitarian concerns with the U.S. government and facilitated meetings between Mizoram leaders and U.S. officials.
- **Mizoram leaders involved:**
    - Pu R. Lalngeta, President of CYMA, Professor Malsawmliana, Pu Lalchhandama Ralte, Minister of Education, Pu Vanlalvena, Member of Parliament and Professor Lalnuntluanga
- **Refugee support:** BRI appreciates the Mizoram Legislative Assembly's commitment to supporting refugees and invited Speaker Pu Lalrinliana Sailo to the Chin New Year celebration.
- **International cooperation:** BRI encourages the Mizoram government to facilitate international humanitarian assistance benefiting both local communities and refugees.
- **Examples from other countries:** Thailand and Malaysia are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention but host international organizations that assist refugees.

Key message: BRI advocates for humanitarian assistance that supports both the people of Mizoram and refugees, while strengthening cooperation between local leaders and international partners.

BRI's Advocacy for United Nations Agencies in Mizoram

- **UN presence:** BRI has advocated for establishing United Nations agency offices in Mizoram.
- **Practical alternatives:** While establishing a UNHCR office may be challenging, UNICEF and WFP offices could be more feasible options.
- **Humanitarian benefits:** UNICEF, WFP, and WHO could strengthen healthcare, education, nutrition, and humanitarian assistance in Mizoram.
- **Economic opportunities:** Establishing UN offices in Aizawl could create employment opportunities for local Mizo residents.
- **BRI experience:** President Zo Tum Hmung previously worked with UNHCR in Malaysia and advocated for UNICEF's presence in Hakha, Chin State.
- **Regional examples:** UNICEF and WFP already operate in other northeastern Indian states, including Assam and Meghalaya.

Key message: Establishing UN agency offices in Mizoram could strengthen humanitarian services, create local employment opportunities, and benefit both host communities and refugees.

BRI Engagement with Mizoram Government

- **Meeting with Chief Minister:** BRI Chairman Rev. Tim Siemens and President Zo Tum Hmung met with Chief Minister Pu Lalduhawma to discuss establishing UNICEF and WFP offices in Mizoram.
- **Briefing submitted:** BRI presented a briefing on UN and INGO activities in Northeast India, highlighting opportunities for Mizoram.
- **U.S. advocacy:** BRI continues advocating for potential U.S. financial support.
- **Government action:** BRI encouraged the Mizoram government to take the initiative in advancing these efforts.
- **Follow up discussion:** BRI shared the briefing with MLA Pu Lalmuanpuia Punte during the Chin New Year celebration.
- **Regional examples:** The briefing highlighted UNICEF's presence in Assam and WFP's partnership with Meghalaya.

CAM with Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, April 2024. Source: CAM Delegation

Former Speaker Sailo meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, April 2024. Source: Mr. Sailo

Key message: BRI remains committed to advocating for international support, while emphasizing the importance of leadership and initiative from the Mizoram government.

UNHCR Partner Agencies in Mizoram

- **UNHCR partnerships:** UNHCR works with governments, UN agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and national organizations to assist refugees.
- **Humanitarian support:** BRI encourages UNHCR partner organizations to establish a presence in Mizoram.
- **Benefits to Mizoram:** These partnerships could improve essential services, strengthen humanitarian assistance, and reduce the burden on the Mizoram government.
- **Government collaboration:** BRI encourages the Mizoram government to explore opportunities to collaborate with UNHCR partners and international humanitarian organizations.

Key message: International partnerships could strengthen humanitarian assistance for both refugees and local communities in Mizoram.

References: UNHCR Official Partners Page

Updates: Refugees from Burma in India

The crisis was worsening in both Chin State, Burma, and Mizoram, India.

As of March 2023

- An estimated 53,500 refugees had fled to India since the 2021 coup
- Of this number, 40,150 resided in Mizoram, 8,250 reside in Manipur, and 5,092 had presented themselves for registration in New Delhi

UPDATE: As of July 31, 2026, 63,200 refugees from Burma fled to India since coup.

Refugees in Mizoram by District

Siaha, 8,500	Hnahthial, 1,200	Champhai, 10,250
Lawngtlai, 5,950	Lunglei, 2,100	Aizawl, 10,000
Other Districts: 1,750		

Source: CAM, "Chin Refugees in India's Mizoram State," June 2023. Source Refugee Update: Myanmar Situation UNHCR Portal as of 7/31/2026 .

Map from Mizoram Directorate of Economics and Statistics, via CAM, "Chin Refugees in India's Mizoram State," June 2023

Update: IDPs in Western Burma

March 2023 to May 2026 to August 2026

UPDATE

	March 2023	May 2026	**August 2026**
Chin State:	48,700	98,000	**117,900**
Sagaing Region:	763,100	1,302,800	**1,346,100**
Magway Region:	195,700	280,800	**472,100**
TOTAL	**1,007,500**	**1,681,100**	**1,936,100**

UNHCR: Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, May 2, 2026.

Source March 2023 data: CAM, "Chin Refugees in India's Mizoram State," June 2023; Source May 2026 data: UNHCR Myanmar Emergency Overview Map 5/2/2026; Source August 2026 data: https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/mmr , August 10, 2026

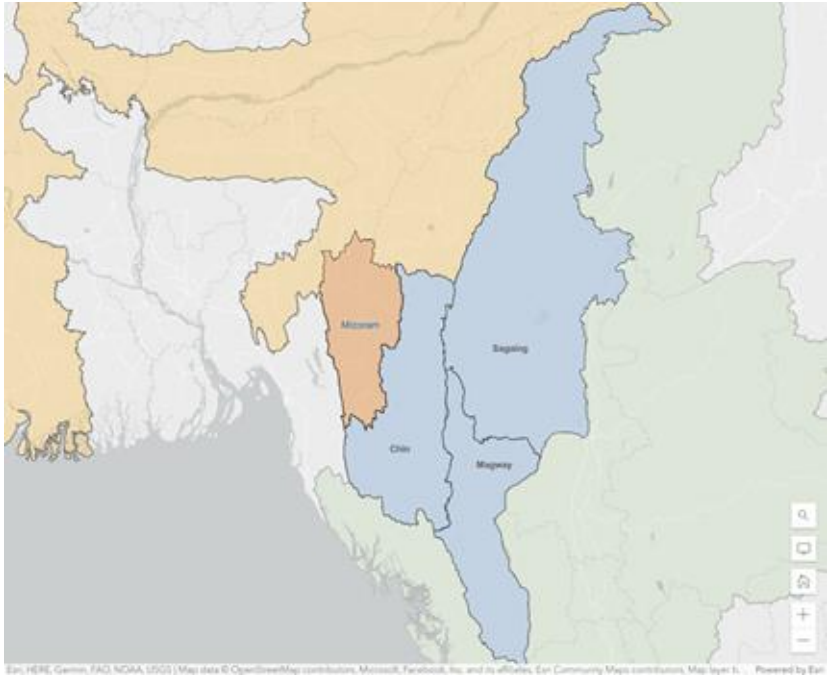
Root Causes of IDPs in Chin State and Sagaing and Magway Regions

In the past two years, Mizoram NGOs note an ebb and flow of refugees from Chin State and elsewhere in Burma that corresponds to the level of violence and conditions inside the country.

The unsafe conditions for IDPs in Burma which drive them to become refugees in India include:

- Tatmadaw ground assaults and air attacks, many against Christians
- Restrictions on aid orgs and INGOs
- Attacks on INGO workers and theft of aid
- IDP camp restrictions
- Insufficient funding (UNHCR reports only 39% of need is covered)

Between Chin State, Sagaing Region, and Magway Region, there are over 1.9 million IDPs in the Northwest who may potentially be forced to flee across an international border. India already has 87,500 refugees from Burma, with 63,200 arriving since the coup.



CAM Map created using ArcGIS Online

IDP data Source: https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/mmr (as of August 10, 2026);
Source Refugee Update: Myanmar Situation UNHCR Portal as of 7/31/2026 .

Burma: Severe Violations of Religious Freedom Against Christians

Many of the Burmese military's targets are Christians from minority ethnic nationalities such as Chin, Kachin, Karenni, and Karen.

Key Statistics Since the Coup

Churches destroyed:

343

Christian churches/buildings damaged or destroyed

Christians killed:

149

for faith-related reasons

Christians imprisoned:

218

for faith-related reasons

USCIRF Victim List:

Two

Chin pastors

Attacks on worship/shelter

32

incidents involving attacks against churches at the time they sheltered civilians or hosted worship

CASE STUDY 1: Thantlang Destroyed and 21 of the town's 22 Churches Destroyed by Burmese Military

Burmese military attacks against Thantlang Town, Chin State, began September 18, 2021, and continued for another year until all of its population of 10,000 was forced to leave and 21 of its 22 churches were destroyed.

CASE STUDY 1: Thantlang and 21 of the town's 22 Churches Destroyed by the Burmese Military—p 2

Twenty-One Churches Destroyed

1. Thantlang Baptist Church
2. Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
3. Johnson Memorial Baptist Church
4. Church on the Rock
5. Thantlang Centenary Baptist Church
6. Seventh Day Adventist
7. Believer Church of Myanmar
8. Evangelical Free Methodist Church
9. Assembly of God Myanmar
10. United Pentecostal Church
11. Mara Evangelical Church
13. Church of Jesus Christ
14. St. Nicholas Catholic Church
15. The Church
16. Evangelical Holiness Church
17. Sabbath
18. Gospel Baptist Church
19. Mara Baptist Church
20. Methodist Church
21. Shalom Baptist Church

Case Study 1: Thantlang Town Destroyed and 21 of 22 Churches Destroyed, including Johnson Memorial Baptist Church

Johnson Memorial Baptist Church before and after the Burmese military destroyed it on May 24, 2022 (Photos: BRI/CAM sources, anonymous for security reasons)

Case Study 1: Thantlang Town Destroyed and 21 of 22 Churches Destroyed, including Thantlang Baptist Church

Thantlang Baptist Church before and after the Burmese military burned it down on June 9, 2022.

(Photo: BRI/CAM sources, anonymous for security reasons)

Case Study 1: Thantlang Town Destroyed and 21 of 22 Churches Destroyed, including Assembly of God Church and Believers' Church

Assembly of God Church, before and after

Believers' Church, before and after

Case Study 1: Thantlang Town Destroyed and 21 of 22 Churches Destroyed, including the six churches on the next slide shown before they were attacked

The 6 photos in the next slide are from BRI/CAM sources, anonymous for security reasons. They come from before the Burmese military attacks in 2021 and 2022. BRI/CAM has received confirmation that all of these churches are among the 21 of 22 Thantlang churches that have been destroyed by the Burmese military. Note that Pastor Cung Biak Hum, who was killed by the Burmese military, is circled in red in the photo of Centennial Baptist Church.

Case Study 1: Thantlang Town Destroyed and 21 of 22 Churches Destroyed, including the six churches on this slide shown before they were attacked

United Pentecostal Church

Thantlang Centennial Baptist Church

Methodist Church

Presbyterian Church

Church on the Rock

Thantlang Association of Baptist Churches

Case Study 2: Burmese military destroyed Catholic churches in Karenni State, Kachin State, and Sagaing Region

Mary Queen of Peace Church, Karenni State

St. Theresa's Church, Karenni State

St. Matthew's Church, Karenni State

St. Patrick's Cathedral, Kachin State

Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Sagaing Region

Case Study 3: Burmese military airstrikes destroyed churches on major Christian holy days: Christmas, Easter Sunday, and Palm Sunday—p 1

Mindat Baptist Church, Mindat, Chin State, before (left) and after (right) Tatmadaw airstrike. Palm Sunday Ap 13 2025

Two houses in Mindat Town, Chin State, destroyed by Burmese military airstrikes Christmas 2025

Case Study 3: Burmese military airstrikes destroyed churches on major Christian holy days: Christmas, Easter Sunday, and Palm Sunday--p 2

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 2021, the Burmese military killed at least **35 people** near **Mo So Village** in Hpruso Township, in **Karenni** (Kayah) State, including four children and two Save the Children staff members.

Case Study 3: Burmese Military destroys churches on major Christian holy days: Christmas, Easter Sunday, and Palm Sunday--p 3

On April 8, 2025, Burmese military airstrikes destroyed **Christ the King Catholic Church** in **Falam**, Chin State, less than two weeks before Easter on April 20, 2025.

Later the Catholic Bishop of Hakha, Lucius, during a pastoral visit after the attack, said,

"They destroyed the walls of the church, but not the faith."

Religious Persecution Update #1: Burma Military Murders Reverend William, June 2026

The Military has continued its brutal campaign to persecute Christians with the recent murder of 2 pastors:

“Reverend William, senior pastor of Chungcung Baptist Church in Chin State, was killed along with Mr. Nam Ceu by the Burmese military on June 4, 2026…

On May 16, 2026, Reverend William — who used no surname — was arrested along with Nam Ceu by the 77th Light Infantry Division, based in Bago (Pegu), at a farm tent one mile from the village. Five people were present at the tent; three fled. Reverend William did not flee, believing his pastoral identification card would protect him…. Two credible sources from Hakha, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons, told BRI that Colonel Hluan Moe Naing held the two men, who were with him in Hakha on June 2 and in Thantlang on June 3. The church and their families have concluded that Reverend William and Nam Ceu were killed that day….”

See https://burmari.org/2026/08/27/chin-christian-pastor-killed-by-burmese-military-bri-urges-trump-administration-to-protect-persecuted-christians-in-burma/

Religious Persecution Update #2: Burma Military Reverend Dal Thawn Tuang, September 2026

"The Burma Research Institute (BRI) confirms that on September 14, 2026, at approximately 4:00 p.m. Burma time, the Burmese military shot and killed Reverend Dal Thawn Tuang, assistant pastor of Lamzang Baptist Church in Lamzang Village, Chin State, where he had served for 22 years. Pastor Tuang, 49, is survived by his wife and two children. His funeral was held on September 16 at 1:00 p.m. Burma time in Lamzang Village, which is about 5.5 miles from Tiddim town…."

See https://burmari.org/2026/09/17/burma-research-institute-urges-immediate-white-house-action-after-burmese-military-kills-christian-pastor-dal-thawn-tuang-in-burma/

Key Recommendations to Mizoram

1a. Advocate for the presence of UN Agencies including UNICEF and WFP.

1b. UNHCR Partners and INGOs in Mizoram which would provide assistance to the Mizoram host community as well as the Chin refugees.

2. Pray for the people of Burma, especially for the protection of the persecuted Christians in Burma.

Additional Sources:

On January 29, 2026, BRI released its report, ***Burma: Severe Violations of Religious Freedom Against Christians.*** See that full BRI report at the following link

https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Burma-Severe-Violations-of-Religious-Freedom-Against-Christians-January-2026.pdf

On March 23, 2026, we urged the State Department to act on our recommendations from this latest report. See the Letter sent to Sec. Rubio on March 23, 2026, at the following link.

https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Rubio-March-23-2026.pdf

On May 6, 2026, we received an encouraging letter back from a senior State Department official on behalf of Secretary Rubio. See Letter received by BRI from the State Department at the following link.

https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/State-Department-Response-—-March-23-2026-Letter.pdf

We are hopeful and continue to urge Secretary Rubio to act on our recommendations.

Thank You

Question?