

TANINTHARYI REGION PROFILE

UPDATED: JUNE 2014¹



Map: Myanmar Information Management Unit

Region	Tanintharyi
Flag	
Previous Name	Tenasserim
State Capital	Dawei
Number of Districts	3
Number of Townships	10
Ward and Village Tracts	347
Total population (Est. 2012)	1,713,447
IDPs	71,650
Refugees	6,015
Area	16,729 sq. miles / 43,328 sq. kms
Borders	North: Mon State
	East: Thailand
	West: Andaman Sea South: Ranong province, Thailand
Latitude	14° 5' 2.98"N
Longitude	98° 12'E 5.67"E
Ethnicities	Bamar, Rakhine, Mon, Shan, Karen, Salone, Malay (Bashu)

Background

Located in south-eastern Myanmar, Tanintharyi Region is bounded by Mon State to the north, Thailand to the east and south, and the Andaman Sea to the west. Previously known as Tenasserim Division, and later renamed Tanintharyi Division before being reclassified as a Region, Tanintharyi is a long and narrow strip of land which covers over 43,000km of territory. The region historically covered an even larger area, at one point in the 19th century encompassing almost all of south-east Myanmar, including what are now Mon and Kayin States and Bago Region, with Mawlamyine as its former capital. Kayin State, then known as Karen State, was created upon independence from the British in 1948, while Mon State was established as a separate territory in 1974. Since then the capital of Tanintharyi Region has been Dawei.

Unlike its neighbouring states to the north, Tanintharyi's name is not derived from a particular ethnic group, nor has its history since independence in 1948 been defined primarily by ethnic armed conflict, although both the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Karen National Union (KNU) have operated there. Although research for this profile did not clarify the historical origins of the names Tenasserim and Tanintharyi, it should be noted that both appear throughout the territory. In addition to Tanintharyi Region, there are townships and towns named

¹ Disclaimer: These state profiles were printed in June 2014, and will be updated periodically by the UNHCR South-East Myanmar Information Management Unit to reflect new developments, additions and corrections.



Tanintharyi, as well as the Region's main river, once known as "the Great Tenasserim" river, which runs north to south and empties into the Andaman sea at Myeik.

Karen leaders have historically envisioned Tanintharyi as part of *Kawthoolei*, the Karen free state that the KNU pursued before shifting its demands towards federalism in Myanmar, despite only a minority of the populations estimated to be Karen. In the KNU map of the area, which does not correspond directly with official government boundaries, the vast majority of Tanintharyi is considered the Mergui-Tavoy (aka. Myeik-Dawei) district under the administration of KNU Brigade 4. The NMSP's own area of operation, also a product of overlapping boundaries and territory, has been historically limited only to the northern parts of the Region near the official border with Mon State.

In contrast to elsewhere in the South-East, there has been a relatively low level of armed conflict in Tanintharyi since British independence in 1948, with few armed clashes since the 1980s. A major factor has been Brigade 4's limited capacity and isolation from central KNU authority, allowing the Myanmar army (Tatmadaw) to control most of the Region. For example, a KNU survey in 1995 reportedly found only 40,000 civilians in their controlled areas. Unfortunately, even in the absence of frequent armed clashes, the people of Tanintharyi have endured decades of displacement. Most sources suggest the peak of displacement occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s, with recent tensions more often connected to military practices, land confiscation and commercial investment projects.

Population Profile

At the time of the 1983 national census, Tanintharyi Region had an official population of 917,628, however recent estimates suggest the population has since nearly doubled. According to UNHCR's government counterpart, the Ministry for the Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs (Natala), the population in December 2012 was 1,713,447, while other government departments offered similar numbers. The 2014 national census should provide more definitive population and demographic data. Sparsely populated considering its long, mountainous terrain, most of Tanintharyi's primarily rural population live either near the coast or along one of rivers and tributaries, such as the Tanintharyi River. By contrast, Mon State is estimated to have twice the population but less than a third the landmass.

As noted above, Tanintharyi is not the home to a dominant minority ethnic group, which is the basis for its classification as a Region, unlike Mon, Kayin and Kayah States.² The majority of residents in Tanintharyi are believed to be members of the Bamar ethnic group, although some self-identify as members of sub-groups such as the Dawei/Tavoyan people. Likewise, while almost all in Tanintharyi speak Myanmar language, there are various local dialects, including some which differ quite dramatically from those elsewhere in the country. Several defined ethnic minorities are also present in Myanmar, including the Karen, Mon, Shan and Rakhine. Buddhism is the dominant religion in Tanintharyi, although Islam and Christianity are also observed, the latter primarily in Karen communities.

Owing to the limited scope of armed conflict in recent decades, Tanintharyi's refugee population in Thailand as of 2014 is modest relative to Kayin and Kayah State. Approximately 6000 refugees from Tanintharyi Region are in Thailand, roughly two-thirds of whom are registered,³ the majority originating from Dawei Township. As elsewhere in south-east Myanmar, reliable figures on internal displacement are elusive, however with that

² Following the introduction of a new Constitution in 2008, territories and divisions in Myanmar were separated into seven Regions and seven States. The purpose was to separate Regions, populated primarily by ethnic Bamar, from States, inhabited by a dominant ethnic minority, such as the Karen, Mon, or Karenni.

³ The Royal Thai government suspended registration in 2006. All new arrivals since then are unregistered, although they receive the same assistance and protection.



caveat, the most common estimate suggests there are 71,650 IDPs in Tanintharyi Region. While those figures show the northern Yebyu Township as having the highest concentration of IDPs, large groups were noted in seven of Tanintharyi's ten townships.

The classification of IDPs is complicated in Tanintharyi because in addition to those displaced by armed conflict, many have been displaced by tactics such as land confiscation and arbitrary taxation, allegedly carried out by both the Tatmadaw and the KNU. Moreover, while the relative stability of Tanintharyi Region in recent decades has allowed it to develop quicker than Kayin and Mon State, the establishment of large-scale rubber and palm oil plantations in Tanintharyi has spawned less than voluntary movements which blur the lines between economic migration and forced displacement. As a result, access to land has emerged as a significant and complex issue preventing many, including refugee and IDP returnees, from (re)-establishing themselves in their desired locations.

Township ⁴	Refugees (2013)	IDPs (2012)
Dawei	4,403	5,600
Launglon	0	0
Thayetchaung	24	4,100
Yebyu	52	23,500
Myeik	972	6,050
Tanintharyi	242	14,640
Kyunsu	0	0
Palaw	273	14,540
Kawthaung	14	0
Bokpyin	30	3,220
TOTAL	6,015	71,650

Administrative Divisions

The capital of Tanintharyi Region is Dawei, previously known as Tavoy, while Myeik is an almost equally significant economic, political and social hub. The state is divided into three districts and ten townships.

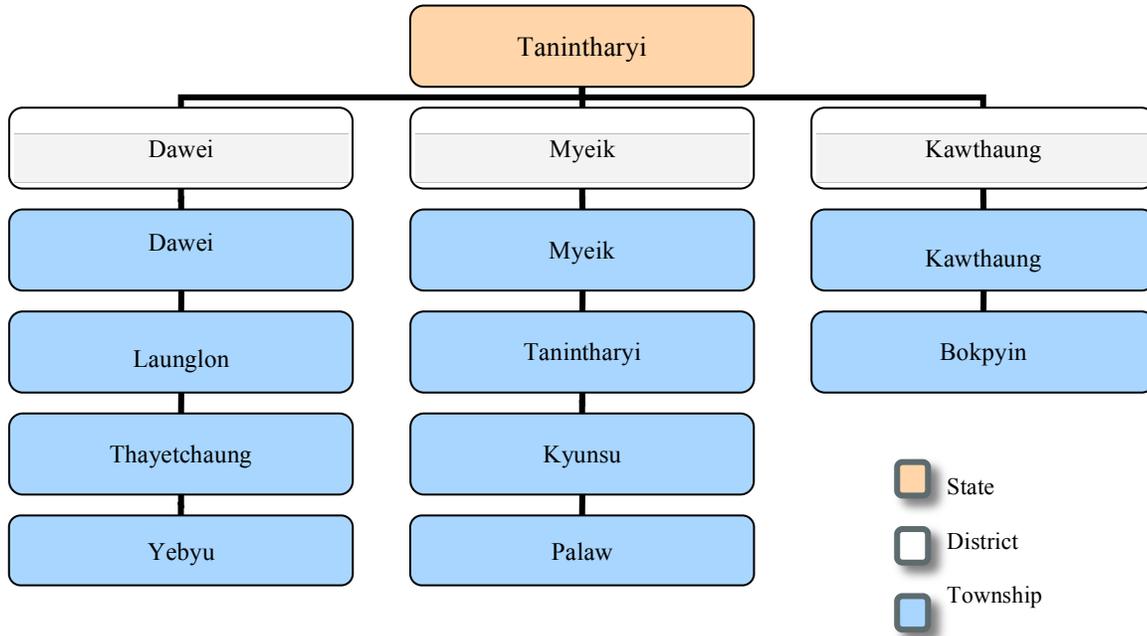
Name of Ministers and Ministries in Tanintharyi Region

Tanintharyi Region			
1.	Myat Ko	Chief Minister	USDP
2.	Col Zaw Lwin	Ministry of Security and Border Affairs	Military-appointed
3.	Than Aung	Ministry of Finance and Revenue	USDP
4.	Win Aung	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Breeding	USDP
5.	Tin Soe	Ministry of Forestry and Mines	USDP
6.	Thein Lwin	Ministry of Planning and Economics	USDP
7.	Kyaw Hsan	Ministry of Transport	USDP
8.	Win Swe	Ministry of Electric Power and Industry	USDP

⁴ Refugee figures are registered totals according to UNHCR ProGres database, and do not include the unregistered caseload. IDP estimates are from TBC.



9.	Aung Kyaw Kyaw Oo	Ministry of Development Affairs	USDP
10.	Dr. Win Aung	Ministry of Social Affairs	USDP
11.	Harvi	Ministry of National Races Affairs (Karen)	USDP



Non-State Actors

KNU Brigade 4 has been the primary non-state actor (NSA) throughout Tanintharyi since the KNU itself was established in 1949. With its central headquarters in Manerplaw in Kayin State, and an armed wing called the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), each of the organization’s seven Brigades possesses a degree of autonomy over their respective territories. Brigade 4 has historically been the most isolated among KNU brigades, often travelling through Thailand to access its own headquarters, and receiving inconsistent support from Manerplaw as a result.

While the KNU’s territorial control in Tanintharyi has been historically scattered along border areas, in part due the Region’s vast, sparsely populated landmass and mixed population, some of Brigade 4’s traditional strongholds have nonetheless proven strategically significant. Perhaps the earliest source of tension was the town of Myitta and its nearby Heinda tin mines, which as far back as the 1970s and 1980s were the location of counter-insurgency tactics aimed at securing control of the area. In the 1990s, the Tatmadaw staged an offensive in Yebyu Township in order to facilitate the construction of the Yadana gas pipeline, a project the KNU opposed. More recently, a major underlying factor in the ceasefire negotiations between the KNU and union government is believed to be Brigade 4’s control of areas pivotal to the Dawei deep seaport mega project, which runs through Dawei Township.



For its part, the NMSP’s presence in Tanintharyi has been limited to the northern parts of Yebyu Township, where members of the Mon ethnic group are found. Of particular concern to the NMSP has been a settlement in Yebyu, known locally as “Tavoy” (although not in fact located near Dawei town or within Dawei township, both formerly known as Tavoy), which is one of three resettlement sites established when approximately 10,000 Mon refugees were returned from Thailand during the NMSP ceasefire in the mid-1990s. As with the other resettlement sites closer to Three Pagoda Pass, at the nexus of Mon State, Kayin State and Thailand, the Tavoy resettlement site has remained under NMSP control since its establishment almost two decades ago.⁵

Ceasefire Updates

Opposition Group	Karen National Union (KNU)
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headquarters at Manerplaw, Hlaingbwe Township in Kayin State near Thai border. Brigade 4 operates throughout Tanintharyi, historically controlling border areas.
Cease-fire Negotiations and Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government negotiation team met with KNU on the Thai-Myanmar border town of Mae Sot on 19 December 2011 for initial ceasefire talks. KNU signed a ceasefire agreement with the government on 12 January 2012. KNU will hold weapons for self-protection. The Karen National Union and the Myanmar Government delegations achieved 13 common positions in formalizing an initial historic ceasefire agreement between the two sides at their ‘peace talks’ held on 6 April 2012 at the Sedona Hotel in Yangon. The Karen National Union’s peace talk delegates held an informal two-hour closed-door meeting with Myanmar’s President, U Thein Sein, in Nay Pyi Taw on 7 April 2012. KNU delegates met with 24 leaders of the country’s ethnic and democratic political parties on 7 April 2012. The Karen National Union (KNU) opened a liaison office in Dawei on 10 April 2012. A total of six KNU liaison offices have been opened throughout the South-East. 17 September 2012, the government released 514 prisoners under Article 401(1) of the Criminal Code, including 19 Karen political prisoners.
Current Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ceasefire has held and the KNU has taken a leadership role in nationwide ceasefire talks throughout 2013 and 2014, including hosting a summit of country-wide NSAs in Hpa-An in January 2014 as a precursor to the second round of negotiations with the government.
Opposition Group	New Mon State Party (NMSP)
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based in Mon State, with some presence in Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region.

⁵ Further details on this can be found in several sources under References, including the UNHCR Research Paper, *Ceasefires and durable solutions in Myanmar: a lessons learned review*, by Kim Jolliffe and with a commentary from Ashley South.



Cease-fires	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signed ceasefire agreement with the government on 29 June 1995.• The agreement was broken in 2010 when the government asked NMSP to transform into the Border Guard Force (BGF), which the NMSP refused.• Subsequent discussions with the government in 2011 and 2012 were successful, ceasefire agreement was restored, although political prisoners not yet released.
Situation Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As of 2014, the situation between the NMSP and government has been calm. NMSP is actively involved in nationwide ceasefire negotiations.

Economy and Livelihoods

As with elsewhere in south-east Myanmar, subsistence agriculture - both permanent and shifting - is the primary livelihood in the predominantly rural Tanintharyi Region, although the mountainous terrain limits cultivation in northern townships. Fishing is also an especially significant industry owing to the long coastline along the Andaman Sea. One of the two largest fish producing areas in Myanmar alongside Ayeyarwady Region, Tanintharyi produced, according to one report, 650,000 tons of fish during the 2009-10 season, far higher than the yield of 150,000 tons in Mon State. Several local prawn and fish farms, as well as processing plants, are also connected to this business as well.

A prominent and controversial driver of the Tanintharyi economy are the vast rubber and palm oil plantations, most of which are in the lowland south, and are often connected to their own processing plants. The relative absence of conflict in Tanintharyi, combined with its vast but sparsely populated territory, allowed these plantations to emerge earlier than in neighbouring states. While these developments have benefitted the Region economically, spurring investment and employment, problems such as deforestation, displacement and land grabbing have been attributed to the proliferation of these plantations. Mining has also emerged as a significant industry in resource-rich Tanintharyi for the same reason, with Tanintharyi supplying up to two-thirds of Myanmar's tin and tungsten.

As demonstrated by the number of mines and plantations throughout the region, many of which are owned by foreign corporations, Tanintharyi's stability opened it to foreign investment long before areas such as Kayin State which are only now beginning to receive such attention. For example, the construction of the aforementioned Yadana gas pipeline in the 1990s involved TOTAL and Unocal, two multinational oil and gas companies. The current Dawei deep seaport and Special Economic Zone projects are part of a massive industrial plan that aims to capitalize on Tanintharyi's geographic location and further untapped potential, with the broader objective of ending Myanmar's status as the weak link in the South-East Asian industrial corridor. Hampered by setbacks with financing, the completion of the Dawei projects would undoubtedly have an incredible impact on the economy in Dawei Township and Tanintharyi Region, and for better or worse the livelihoods of local populations in the area.

Services and Infrastructure

Similar to the situation in Mon State, the relative stability of Tanintharyi has facilitated access to public services in Tanintharyi, even if the quality of health and education requires continued improvement. There are 30 registered hospitals spread throughout Tanintharyi, according to Ministry of Health data in 2011, although only the general hospitals in Myeik and Dawei offer specialist services. The third largest hospital in the Region,



located in Kawthaung town, has only 100 beds. Similarly, while there are seven universities and colleges in Tanintharyi, all are located within Myeik and Dawei. However, in contrast to Mon, Kayin and Kayah States, there is no legacy of wide-scale non-state service provision throughout Tanintharyi, beyond some cross-border assistance from Thailand.

Tanintharyi offers a mixed bag of physical infrastructure. On one hand, the main highway that runs south through Mon State, narrows and deteriorates upon entering Tanintharyi, weaving perilously through the mountains in Yebyu Township. Road access is therefore problematic outside Dawei and Myeik, particularly during the rainy season. The planned 66km highway from Dawei town to the Thee Khee border crossing with Thailand, which is part of the aforementioned mega project, remains under construction but has the potential to serve as a major trade route. A new railway station is also being built in Dawei to service the planned deep seaport.

Perhaps in part due to the historically poor overland transportation routes, Tanintharyi is well connected by air travel, with seven airports throughout the Region, including three that receive regular flights. By contrast, neither Mon or Kayin State were serviced by regular flights as of May 2014. In addition to the state-owned Myanmar Airways, at least four private airlines fly to Myeik, Dawei and Kawthaung. The wealth of air travel to Tanintharyi is also a testament to the Region's economic development in recent years, and its resultant cross-border trade with Thailand.

Protection and Durable Solutions

With few armed clashes since the 1990s, the primary protection concerns in Tanintharyi now relate to practices such as arbitrary taxation and land confiscation, even if the frequency of these incidents has declined. As elsewhere, both the government and the NSAs have a history of employing such tactics, forcing some communities to form self-defence militias to protect themselves, their land and their property. Based on information derived from the field, it appears that even in Tanintharyi there remains a deep mistrust of all armed actors, despite the apparent stability in recent years.

The issue of land appears to be the most crucial issue throughout Tanintharyi, with several agencies asserting that its inaccessibility is arguably the largest impediment to return for refugees and IDPs. This issue is especially complex here, as commercial investment and land grabbing have exacerbated issues the land issues typically associated with armed conflict. Not only does extractive agriculture prevent returnees from accessing land, particularly those seeking to reclaim plots they once held without tenure, but many of the plantations are in fact farmed by displaced people. Fortunately, there appears to be some recent progress regarding advocacy on land grabbing, led primarily by community and faith-based organizations on the ground.

Regarding durable solutions, UNHCR's field monitoring has confirmed that some refugees and IDPs have begun returning to Tanintharyi, although the refugee numbers remain particularly small. There are essentially two profiles of IDPs living in Tanintharyi, both of whom await a durable solution. On one hand, IDPs living in "hidden sites" are remain in dire conditions, but for the moment are only comfortable maintaining a low profile and living under KNU protection rather than returning home. On the other hand, an unconfirmed number of locally organized relocation sites have historically accommodated most IDPs, and local organizations insist their residents still possess humanitarian needs distinct from the local population. Although exact numbers are unavailable, local sources suggest approximately half of those in this category may have already returned home, while others move back and forth between these sites and their places of origin. It is also this latter group of IDPs who are especially affected by issues such as land grabbing, which serves as both a driver of new displacement and an impediment to return.



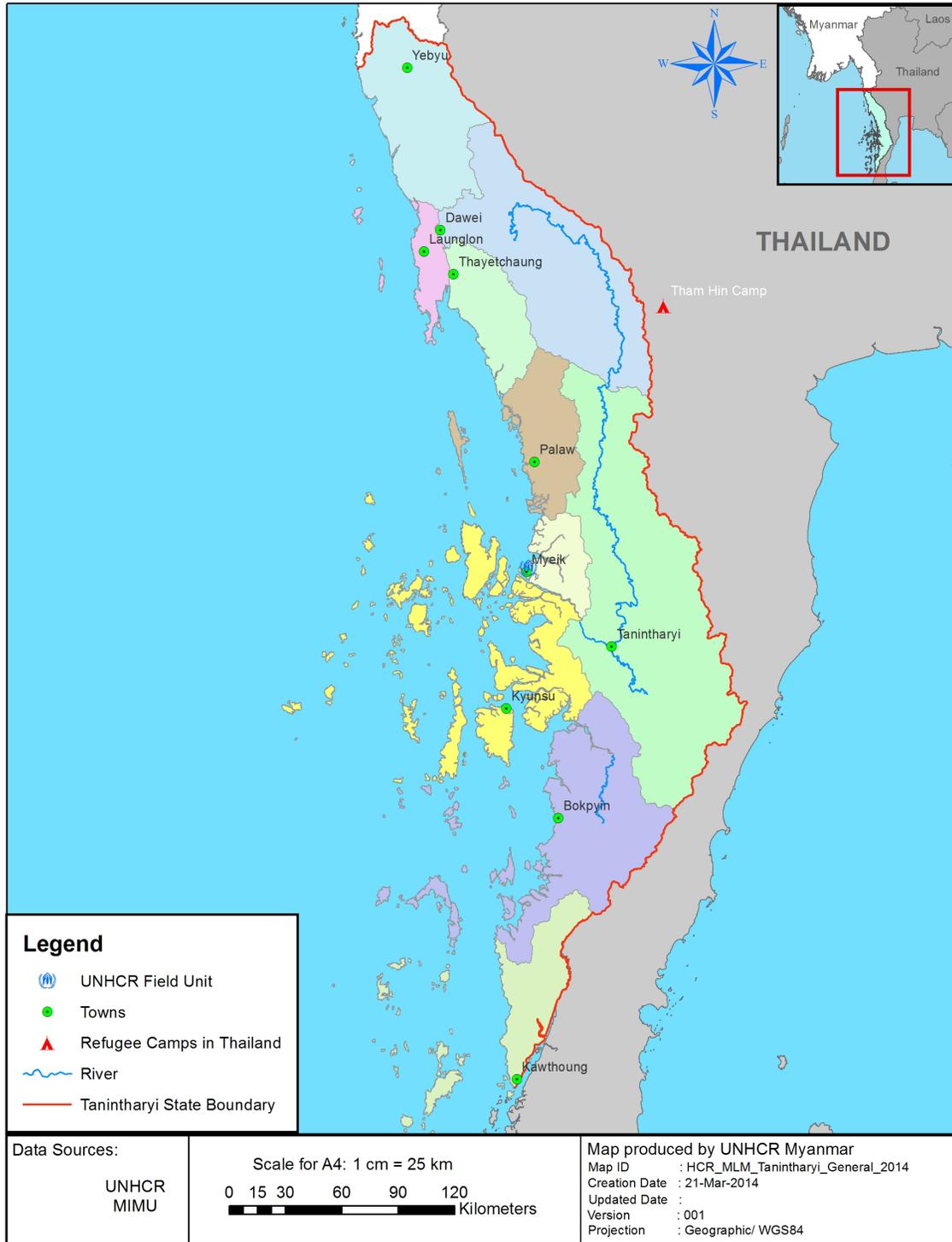
Meanwhile, refugees displaced from Tanintharyi are almost exclusively located in in Tham Hin camp in south-western Thailand, with Dawei Township the area of origin for two-thirds among them. While UNHCR has observed that there is considerable discussion regarding return within the refugee community, few permanent returns have been verified throughout Tanintharyi. Far more frequent are extended exploratory visits whereby part of the family returns to assess the situation in their village of origin before deciding whether the rest of the household should join in returning permanently to Tanintharyi Region. As with those displaced internally, land grabbing is also viewed as a barrier to return to villages of origin, especially considering the potentially radical impact of the deep seaport and special economic zone mega project in Dawei Township.



Annex 1: Map



Tanintharyi Region



Disclaimer: The names shown and the boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNHCR



References

- The Border Consortium (TBC). *International Displacement in South East Burma/Myanmar, 2012*. Bangkok, Thailand, 2012. Available at <http://www.theborderconsortium.org/idps/maproom.htmlp> [accessed 31 July 2013]
- The Border Consortium (TBC), *Internal Displacement in South East Burma/Myanmar, 2011*. Bangkok, Thailand, 2011. Available at <http://www.tbcc.org/idps/map-library/11-10-south-east-myanmar-internal-displacement-2011-high.pdf> [accessed 26 March 2012].
- The Border Consortium (TBC), *Situation Updates (October 2011)*. Bangkok, Thailand, 2011. Available at <http://www.tbcc.org/idps/borderstates.htm> [accessed 26 March 2012].
- The Border Consortium (TBC). *Poverty, Displacement and Local Governance in South East Burma/Myanmar, 2013*. Bangkok, Thailand, November 2013.
- "Burma: An End to Civil War." *Irawaddy*, 12 January 2012. Available at: http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22897 [accessed 20 June 2012]
- Burma Ethnic Research Group and Friedrich Naumann Foundation. *Forgotten Victims of a Hidden War*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Nopburee Press, April 1998.
- Chachavalpongpon, Pavin. "Dawei Port: Thailand's Megaproject in Burma." *Global Asia* (Winter 2011).
- Isono, Ikumo, and Satoru Kumagai. "Dawei revisited: Reaffirmation of the importance of the project in the era of reforms in Myanmar." *Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia Policy Brief*, No 2013-01 (May 2013).
- Jolliffe, Kim. "Ceasefires and durable solutions in Myanmar: a lessons learned review." *New Issues in Refugee Research*, UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service: Geneva, Switzerland, forthcoming.
- Kuroiwa, Yok and Verkuyten, Maykel. "Narratives and the Constitution of a Common Identity: The Karen in Burma." *Identities* 15, No 4 (2008): 391-412.
- Lall, Marie. "Ethnic Conflict and the 2010 Elections in Burma." Asia Programme Paper, Chatham House, November 2009.
- McConnachie, Kirsten. "Rethinking the 'Refugee Warrior': The Karen National Union and Refugee Protection on the Thai-Burma Border." *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 4, No. 1 (2012): 30-56.
- Ministry for the Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs (NATALA). *Household List and Population Data*, 31 March 2012.
- Myanmar Online Data Information Network Solutions. "Facts about Myanmar: Mon State." Accessed 18 March 2014. http://www.modins.net/myanmarinfo/state_division/taninthayi.htm
- Naing, Saw Yan. "Open Secrets Behind the KNU Talks." *Irawaddy*, 19 April 2012. Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/open-secrets-behind-knu-talks> [accessed 1 May 2014]
- "Political Monitor No. 14", Euro-Burma Office Election Monitor. April 2011.
- RECS International Inc., Nippon Koei Co. Ltd., and Oriental Consultants Co. Ltd. *Preparatory Survey for Integrated Regional Development for Ethnic Minorities in South-East Myanmar*. August 2013.



“The Situation in Karen State after the Elections.” EBO (Euro-Burma Office) Analysis Paper No. 1. April 2011.

Small Arms Survey. *Small Arms Survey 2010: Gangs, Groups and Guns*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 12 July 2010.

Smith, Martin. “Ethnic Conflict and the Challenge of Civil Society in Burma.” Paper presented at the conference ‘Strengthening Civil Society in Burma. Possibilities and Dilemmas for International NGOs,’ Transnational Institute and the Burma Centrum Nederland, Amsterdam, 4-5 December 1997.

South, Ashley. *Burma’s Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2011.

South, Ashley. “Karen Nationalist Communities: The ‘Problem’ of Diversity”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 29, No. 1. (2007).

South, Ashley. “Ceasefires and Civil Society: The Case of the Mon.” In *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, edited by Mikael Gravers. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2007.

Thawngmung, Ardeth Maung. *Beyond Armed Resistance: Ethnonational Politics in Burma (Myanmar)*. Honolulu, Hawaii: East-West Centre, 2011.

Vrieze, Paul. “Dawei Village to Sue Thai Mining Firm Over Environmental Impacts.” *Irawaddy*, 17 March 2014. Available at: <http://www.irawaddy.org/burma/dawei-village-sue-thai-mining-firm-environmental-impacts.html> [accessed 1 May 2014]