

MYANMAR:

Displacement continues in context of armed conflicts

A profile of the internal displacement situation

19 July, 2011

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Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

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OVERVIEW

Displacement continues in context of armed conflicts

In November 2010 the first national elections since 1990 were held in Myanmar. While the party set up by the previous government and the armed forces retain most legislative and executive power, the elections may nevertheless have opened up a window of opportunity for greater civilian governance and power-sharing. At the same time, recent fighting between opposition non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and government forces in Kayin/Karen, Kachin, and Shan States, which displaced many within eastern Myanmar and into Thailand and China, is a sign that ethnic tensions remain serious and peace elusive.

Since April 2009, armed conflict between the armed forces and NSAGs has intensified, as several NSAGs that had concluded a ceasefire with the government in the 1990s refused to obey government orders to transform into army-led border guard forces.

Displacement in the context of armed conflict is not systematically monitored by any independent organisation inside the country. Most available information on displacement comes from organisations based on the Thai side of the Thailand-Myanmar border. Limited access to affected areas and lack of independent monitoring make it virtually impossible to verify their reports of the numbers and situations of internally displaced people (IDPs). Although the conflicts in other areas of Myanmar have probably also led to displacement, the only region for which estimates have been available was the south-east, where more than 400,000 people were believed to be living in internal displacement in 2010. More than 70,000 among them were estimated to be newly displaced.

People displaced due to conflict in Myanmar lack access to food, clean water, health care, education and livelihoods. Their security is threatened by ongoing fighting, including where conflict parties reportedly target civilians directly. Although the limited access of humanitarians to most conflict-affected areas has hampered the provision of assistance and protection, the Government of Myanmar took a positive step in 2010 by concluding an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the provision of assistance to conflict-affected communities.

Background and causes of displacement

Myanmar has been affected by armed conflict and related displacement since independence from Britain in 1948. More than 30 ethnic insurgent non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have been active against the government (ICG, December 2008). Eastern areas of the country have been particularly affected. Civilians belonging to ethnic minorities have borne the impacts of the conflict, including human rights violations and displacement. All parties to the conflict have sought to exploit civilians under their control as a source of food and labour and as a recruitment base.

In the 1960s the Myanmar Armed Forces (or *Tatmadaw*) introduced the “four cuts” counter-insurgency strategy, which has consisted in cutting off NSAGs’ access to food, money, information, and personnel (Chatham House, September 2010, p.21). Especially since the late 1990s, it has combined the “four cuts” with a “self-reliance” policy under which *Tatmadaw* units must find their own ways to meet their operational needs, and supplement low salaries and meagre rations. This they do by confiscating food and agricultural land, and by requisitioning civilian labour (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.12; UN GA, 15 September 2010, p.12; Chatham

House, September 2010, p.43). While there are some reports that the self-reliance policy may recently have changed, this has so far not had any impact on the ground (TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, p.6).

As part of the counter-insurgency strategy, civilians are forcibly moved from NSAG-controlled “black” to contested “grey” areas and finally to relocation sites in government-controlled “white” areas. Relocation orders are usually given at short notice, making it difficult for people to take all their belongings with them before houses are burned down. Villages to be relocated are declared “free-fire zones”, and people staying on beyond the relocation deadline face serious protection risks (Chatham House, September 2010, pp.21-22).

NSAGs opposed to the government continued in 2010 to project their image as protectors of minority groups, while relying on the presence of the civilian population in their areas of operation as a source of food, information, and personnel. Civilians provided such goods and services either voluntarily or involuntarily. In turn, NSAGs such as the Karen National Union (KNU)/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) provided limited social and welfare services to civilians in areas under their control (Chatham House, September 2010, p.48).

All parties to the conflicts, including the KNU/KNLA and other opposition NSAGs, have committed human rights violations, although the majority have reportedly been perpetrated by the *Tatmadaw* and the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA), a government-allied NSAG. There has been no independent monitoring of human rights violations in the conflict areas. However, since the elections in November 2010 there have been reports that some opposition NSAGs’ armed actions against government forces have been intended to prevent post-election stability. Civilians have been caught in the cross-fire or targeted directly (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.15; Chatham House, September 2010, pp.19, 48; IDMC interview, 13 July 2011).

During the 1990s the Myanmar government agreed ceasefires with most NSAGs, enabling them to pursue economic activities and to control territory. Some such NSAGs have reportedly heavily exploited natural resources in areas under their control without benefit to local civilians (TNI, July 2010, pp.9-10; CPCS, June 2010, pp.99-100, 147, 270-271).

In April 2009 the government ordered all NSAGs which had agreed ceasefires to transform into *Tatmadaw*-led “border guard forces”, which was a de facto condition for their political wings to contest the November 2010 elections. Some of them refused to transform, including the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)/Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and the 5th Brigade of the DKBA (also known as Golden Drum), and the government therefore considered their ceasefires to have ended (TNI and BCN, February 2011, pp.6, 9; Chatham House, September 2010, p.16; TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, p.7).

The issue of border guard forces resulted in new tensions and fighting between these NSAGs on the one hand and the *Tatmadaw* and government-allied NSAGs on the other, while non-ceasefire groups, including the KNU/KNLA, also continued their armed opposition against the government (IRIN, 29 November 2010; TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, pp.6-7; CPCS, June 2010, p.69).

In recent years the *Tatmadaw* created ethnic militias in ceasefire areas to reinforce the government’s fighting capacity should ceasefires come to an end. There were more than 50 such militias as of January 2011. Opposition NSAGs, for their part, continued working with their own militia (TNI and BCN, February 2011, pp.5, 10; KHRG, 31 August 2010, pp.84-87).

Recent political developments

On 7 November 2010, parliamentary and regional elections were held in Myanmar for the first time since 1990. The new government under President Thein Sein took office in March 2011 (AP, 30 March 2011).

Many observers reported flaws in the election process, including significant manipulation of the vote count (ICG, 7 March 2011, p.2). The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), created by the previous government, continued to dominate politics in Myanmar along with the armed forces. The USDP has majorities in both houses of parliament, and members of the *Tatmadaw* occupy 25 per cent of the seats, as provided for in the 2008 Constitution. The Commander-in-Chief will hold a dominant position in the yet-to-be-formed National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), which is expected to be the most influential executive body, and he has independent decision-making power in the area of military justice and all other military issues (ICG, 7 March 2011, pp.4-5, 7, 18; TNI and BCN, December 2010, pp.1-2).

On the other hand, power is now divided between different office holders and power centres. Some limited political space for opposition and ethnic minority parties has also opened up (ICG, 7 March 2011, pp. 5-7). In all states with non-Burman majority populations except Kayah/Karenni State (but including other conflict and ceasefire areas in eastern Myanmar) some representatives of ethnic minority parties are members of state or regional legislatures. Self-administered areas below state level have been created in Shan State for the Danu, Kokang, Palaung, Pa-O and Wa ethnic groups and in Sagaing Region for the Naga ethnic group. However, some ethnic parties were excluded from the elections (TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, p.7; ICG, 7 March 2011, pp.2, 6; 17; TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.3; TNI and BCN, February 2011, p.11; TNI and BCN, December 2010, p.7).

While the new president acknowledged the importance of a resolution to ethnic armed conflict and while there were reports about an end to the “self-reliance” policy, the *Tatmadaw* appeared to have continued its counter-insurgency strategy in ethnic areas (TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, pp.2-3, 6). It remains to be seen whether the conflict parties will seize the opportunity for reconciliation and true power-sharing in the ethnic minority areas, or whether ethnic and political divisions will continue to increase, as indicated by the resurgence of fighting in some of these areas since the elections (TNI and BCN, February 2011, pp.5, 10, 14; TNI and BCN, December 2010, p.5).

Recent fighting

Fighting between opposition NSAGs and government forces in recent months affected Kayin/Karen, Shan and Kachin States and reportedly displaced thousands of people within Myanmar and across the border into Thailand and China.

In November 2010, one day after the elections, fighting between the DKBA-5th Brigade and the Myanmar Armed Forces in the town of Myawaddy in Kayin/Karen State led to new displacement, with an estimated total of up to 20,000 people fleeing into Thailand within two days (NYT, 8 November 2010; UNHCR, 9 November 2010; IRIN, 9 November 2010). Later clashes between NSAGs and the *Tatmadaw* involved the DKBA-5th Brigade and the KNU/KNLA in Kayin/Karen State, and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) in southern Shan State. In both States, fighting was ongoing in June 2011 (KIC, 18 June 2011; Shan Herald Agency for News, 13 June 2011).

In February 2011 several opposition NSAGs formed a military and political alliance, the United Nationalities Federal Council (Union of Burma) (UNFC-UB). The alliance includes the KNU/KNLA, the KIO/KIA, the NMSP, and the SSPP/SSA, and also the Chin National Front (CNF) and the

National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), both based in western Myanmar (Shan Herald Agency for News, 17 February 2011; TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.44).

Scale of internal displacement in Myanmar

There are no comprehensive figures of the number of people internally displaced due to armed conflict or human rights violations in Myanmar, and it is very difficult to assess the scale of such internal displacement in the country. The available figures only cover those internally displaced people (IDPs) who live in rural areas of south-eastern Myanmar controlled by or accessible to various NSAGs that facilitate the collection of data, and there is no way of verifying them independently. Very little or no information exists on the impacts of armed conflict, human rights violations and displacement on civilians for areas controlled by the government or by government-allied NSAGs (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.30; Chatham House, September 2010, p.6).

UNHCR used an estimate of 451,000 IDPs in Myanmar as its planning figure for 2010, while the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) estimated that in July 2010 at least 446,000 IDPs were living in the 37 surveyed townships (administrative sub-districts) in southern Shan, Kayah/Karenni, Kayin/Karen and Mon States and Bago/Pegu and Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Regions. Of those IDPs, it was believed that 125,000 were living in relocation villages in government-controlled areas, 115,000 dispersed in hiding areas in the jungle, and 206,000 living in areas administered by ceasefire NSAGs. The TBBC also reported that an estimated 73,000 of the IDPs in south-eastern Myanmar were newly displaced between August 2009 and July 2010, including some 26,000 people in northern Karen areas and some 8,000 in southern Mon areas (UNHCR, January 2010; TBBC, 28 October 2010, p.20).

Information on internal displacement resulting from recent fighting was scarce, although available reports indicate that thousands were displaced in Kayin/Karen, Shan and Kachin States and into Thailand and China between November 2010 and June 2011 (IRIN, 29 November 2010; Shan Herald Agency for News, 13 June 2011; ReliefWeb, 17 June 2011).

It was believed that more than 500,000 IDPs were living in eastern Myanmar, including in urban areas and mixed administration or “grey” areas (TBBC, 28 October 2010, p.20). An unknown but significant number of IDPs were believed to be living in other parts of Myanmar. Estimates of the total number of IDPs in the country – including many long-term IDPs who had not reached a durable solution – went up to several million (RSC, February 2007, pp.5-6).

Humanitarian and protection issues

Myanmar ranks 132nd among 169 countries in UNDP’s Human Development Index, making it one of the “least developed countries” and one of the poorest countries in Asia. While the percentage of the population below the poverty line fell from 32 to 26 per cent between 2005 and 2010, inequality and disparities between regions have augmented. The country is rich in natural resources and receives significant revenues from their extraction, but these reportedly do not appear in the national budget. Investment is low, and productive assets are lacking (WFP, January 2011; UNGA, 7 March 2011, p.16). Against this backdrop, IDPs in conflict areas of eastern Myanmar are particularly likely to be experiencing extreme poverty.

Access to food and water

Food insecurity was particularly high in 2010 in Northern Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Shan States and in Magway Region. Almost nine per cent of children under five were acutely malnourished (WFP, January 2011). Internally displaced children were likely to be particularly affected.

IDPs in hiding in the south-eastern parts of conflict zones have constantly been moving, making agricultural activity difficult and limiting their access to safe drinking water. Some IDPs have reportedly raised crops on several fields in different locations, to maintain their access to food in case some crops were destroyed or confiscated. There have been reports of authorities confiscating food from IDPs in relocation sites, which was then rationed and distributed among all IDPs in the site (Chatham House, September 2010, pp.34, 36).

Health issues

According to a survey in late 2008 and early 2009, health indicators for Bago/Pegu Region, Kayah/Karenni State, Kayin/Karen State, Mon State, Shan State and Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Region, including conflict-affected areas where large numbers of IDPs live, were significantly worse than for the rest of the country (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 240 women were estimated to have died from a maternal cause for each 100,000 live births in 2008 in Myanmar (WHO, 2010, p.25). By contrast, the maternal mortality rate for south-eastern Myanmar was believed to be three times as high (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010, p.22). The estimated infant mortality rate for Myanmar was 54 deaths for each 1,000 live births in 2009, while the under-five mortality rate was 71 deaths per 1,000 live births (UNICEF, 2010, p.13). For south-eastern Myanmar, however, both rates were estimated to be significantly higher, with an infant mortality rate of 73 deaths per 1,000 live births and an under-five mortality rate of 138 deaths per 1,000 live births (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010, p.22).

Malaria was reported to be the cause of almost a quarter of deaths among the surveyed population in south-eastern Myanmar and for more than a quarter of deaths among children below the age of five, followed by diarrhoea and acute respiratory infection. The risk of severe acute malnutrition was said to be 4.8 times higher for internally displaced children than for non-displaced children (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010, pp.22, 30, 36).

Education

Among all households covered in a recent survey in rural south-eastern Myanmar, fewer than half of all children between the ages of five and 13 were regularly going to school. Reasons for dropping out included insecurity due to ongoing conflict, and the inability to pay school fees (TBBC, 28 October 2010, p.29; UN GA, 7 March 2011, p.14).

Primary education all over Myanmar – with the exception of monastery schools – has been associated with significant informal costs. Like other poor families, displaced families in conflict-affected areas were particularly affected. In addition, it was reported that many schools in conflict areas were not functional, and there was a lack of teachers, as many were unwilling to move to remote areas (UN GA, 7 March 2011, pp.13-14).

Landmines

The widespread use of landmines in areas affected by armed conflict in Myanmar continued to endanger the physical security of civilians including IDPs. Landmines were regarded by various actors as both a danger and a means of protection (Chatham House, September 2010, p.51). While comprehensive information on mine contamination and numbers of people killed or injured were not available, some contamination, mainly with anti-personnel mines, was identified in 33 townships in Chin, Kachin, Kayin/Karen, Kayah/Karenni, Mon, Rakhine/Arakan and Shan States and in Bago/Pegu and Tanintharyi Regions, with all townships in Kayin/Karen and Kayah/Karenni States affected. Available information on mine incidents comes from the government publication

New Light of Myanmar as well as from various NGOs and other sources (ICBL, 27 October 2010).

Both the *Tatmadaw* and NSAGs, including the KIO/KIA, the KNU/KNLA and the DKBA, laid antipersonnel mines in 2009 and 2010. New laying of mines was linked to the government's order to ceasefire groups in April 2009 to transform into border guard forces and the resulting increase in fighting (ICBL, 27 October 2010; GC/DCA, January 2011, p.13; UN GA, 15 September 2010, pp.14-15).

National and international responses

Myanmar does not have a national IDP policy or legislation, and there has been no official recognition of the existence of internal displacement caused by armed conflict or human rights violations in the country. The access of UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations to most areas in south-eastern Myanmar affected by armed conflict and displacement has improved somewhat since early 2010, but remains restricted.

In a situation of limited access, two different approaches to the provision of humanitarian relief in Myanmar have prevailed. Humanitarian organisations based on the Thai side of the Thailand-Myanmar border have been able to provide humanitarian relief, mainly to ethnic Karen IDPs in conflict-affected border areas of south-eastern Myanmar. IDPs of other ethnicities and in other conflict-affected areas have received less or no support. The work of border-based organisations has included data collection and public advocacy, including for greater support by international donors. Many of them have had to rely on more or less strong ties with opposition NSAGs, which have provided them with access to IDP areas, security and logistical support. However, this raises concerns about the independence of such assistance and the extent to which it may contribute to war economies (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.30; Chatham House, September 2010, pp.7, 40-41, 63-64; FMR, 22 April 2008, p.17).

The approach taken by international humanitarian organisations and national and local NGOs based inside Myanmar has been to cautiously engage in humanitarian operations in conflict-affected areas. International organisations have been able to reach conflict IDPs in south-eastern Myanmar sometimes in collaboration with local community-based organisations, and sometimes directly (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.31). In 2010, the Government of Myanmar and UNHCR signed a two-year memorandum of understanding about assistance to conflict-affected communities in the south-east of the country, covering the provision of health services, education and water, shelter, livelihoods and skills training. At the end of the year, UNHCR was providing assistance and protection to about 62,000 IDPs (UN GA, 7 March 2011, p.17; UNHCR, December 2010, p.233; UNHCR, 20 June 2011, p.39).

CAUSES, BACKGROUND AND PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT

Overview of the causes of displacement in Myanmar

Background to conflict and internal displacement in Myanmar

Myanmar has been affected by armed conflict and related displacement since independence from Britain in 1948. More than 30 ethnic insurgent non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have been active against the government (ICG, December 2008). Eastern areas of the country have been particularly affected. Civilians belonging to ethnic minorities have borne the impacts of the conflict, including human rights violations and displacement. All parties to the conflict have sought to exploit civilians under their control as a source of food and labour and as a recruitment base. Current conflict actors include:

- Opposition NSAGs such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA) that had concluded a ceasefire with the government since 1989,
- Opposition non-ceasefire NSAGs such as the Karen National Union (KNU)/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA),
- Local militias allied with opposition NSAGs such as the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO),
- Government-allied NSAGs such as the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA),
- Local pro-government militias,
- The Myanmar Armed Forces (or *Tatmadaw*).

In the 1960s the *Tatmadaw* introduced the “four cuts” counter-insurgency strategy, which has consisted in cutting off NSAGs’ access to food, money, information, and personnel. The strategy has aimed at transforming “black” (NSAG-controlled) areas into “grey” (contested) and then “white” (*Tatmadaw*-controlled) areas (ANU, 4 October 2007; Chatham House, September 2010, p.21).

Especially since the late 1990s, the Myanmar Armed Forces have combined the “four cuts” with a “self-reliance” policy under which *Tatmadaw* units in the field must find their own ways to meet their operational needs, and supplement low salaries and meagre rations. This they do by confiscating food and agricultural land, and by requisitioning civilian labour (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.12; UN GA, 15 September 2010, p.12; Chatham House, September 2010, p.43). While there are some reports that the self-reliance policy may recently have changed, this has so far not had any impact on the ground (TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, p.6).

As part of the counter-insurgency strategy, villagers are forcibly moved from “black” areas to contested “grey” areas and finally to relocation sites in “white” areas. Relocation orders are usually given at short notice, making it difficult for people to take all their belongings with them before houses are burned down. Villages to be relocated are declared “free-fire zones”, and people staying on beyond the relocation deadline face serious protection risks (Chatham House, September 2010, pp.21-22).

Immediately after having been shifted to relocation sites, internally displaced people (IDPs) were reported to have limited freedom of movement: Leaving the site was apparently only possible for IDPs who bought a pass, which was usually valid for one or several days only. After a number of years, authorities may give up control of relocation sites, with some IDPs returning to their places

of origin and others resettling elsewhere. Others may choose to stay, although new forced relocation by the *Tatmadaw* may still remain a threat (Chatham House, September 2010, p.36; RSC, February 2007, pp.14-15).

NSAGs opposed to the government continued in 2010 to project their image as protectors of “their” respective minority groups, while relying on the presence of the civilian population in their areas of operation as a source of food, information, and personnel. Civilians provided such goods and services either voluntarily or involuntarily. In turn, NSAGs such as the KNU/KNLA provided limited social and welfare services to civilians in areas under their control (Chatham House, September 2010, p.48).

All parties to the conflicts, including the KNU/KNLA and other opposition NSAGs, have committed human rights violations, although the majority have reportedly been perpetrated by the *Tatmadaw* and the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA), a government-allied NSAG. There has been no independent monitoring of human rights violations in the conflict areas. However, since the elections in November 2010 there have been reports that some opposition NSAGs’ armed actions against government forces have been intended to prevent post-election stability. Civilians have been caught in the cross-fire or targeted directly (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.15; Chatham House, September 2010, pp.19, 48; IDMC interview, 21 June 2011).

Current situation of ceasefires and Border Guard Force issue

During the 1990s the Myanmar government agreed ceasefires with most NSAGs, enabling them to pursue economic activities and to control territory. Some such NSAGs have reportedly heavily exploited natural resources in areas under their control without benefit to local civilians (TNI, July 2009, pp.9-10; CPCS, June 2010, pp.99-100, 147, 270-271).

Up until 2009, ceasefire areas had been characterised by an absence of fighting, although displacement of civilians was reported to have continued there because of human rights violations by government forces and allied NSAGs such as the DKBA, which forced people to serve as porters and extorted money and goods from them. In April 2009 the Myanmar government ordered all ceasefire NSAGs to transform into *Tatmadaw*-led “border guard forces” (BGF), which was a de facto precondition for their political wings to contest the November 2010 elections. 1 September 2010 was the final deadline for transformation into BGF (Chatham House, September 2010, p.16; TNI and BCN, February 2011, pp.3, 9).

The following ceasefire NSAGs refused to transform:

- United Wa State Army (UWSA),
- National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) based in Mongla (eastern Shan State),
- Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)/Kachin Independence Army (KIA),
- New Mon State Party (NMSP),
- 5th Brigade of the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA) (also known as Golden Drum),
- Kayan New Land Party,
- KNU/KNLA Peace Council,
- Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) (a breakaway faction of the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N)).

The Myanmar government therefore considered their ceasefires to have ended (TNI and BCN, February 2011, pp.6, 9; TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, p.7; Chatham House, September 2010, p.16).

All of these NSAGs did not take the same approach to the November 2010 elections. For example, the UWSA was opposed to the new self-administered Wa area, as the latter does not include all UWSA-controlled territory and as its headquarters is outside UWSA territory. The UWSA did not allow election authorities to enter its area prior to the November 2010 elections, and it did not form a political party to contest the elections. The KIO, by contrast, supported the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP), which was led by former KIO leaders. However, the authorities did not register the KSPP for the November 2010 elections because of its links with the KIO, which refused to transform into a BGF (TNI and BCN, December 2010, pp.7-8).

The BGF issue resulted in new tensions and fighting between these NSAGs on the one hand and the *Tatmadaw* and government-allied NSAGs on the other, while non-ceasefire groups, including the KNU/KNLA, also continued their armed opposition against the government (Le Monde diplomatique, November 2009; IRIN, 29 November 2010; TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, pp.6-7; CPCS, June 2010, p.69). In recent years the *Tatmadaw* created ethnic militias in ceasefire areas to reinforce the government's fighting capacity should ceasefires come to an end. There were more than 50 such militias as of January 2011. Opposition NSAGs, for their part, continued working with their own militia (TNI and BCN, February 2011, pp.5, 10; KHRG, 31 August 2010, pp.84-87).

Political developments

On 7 November 2010, parliamentary and regional elections were held in Myanmar for the first time since 1990. In February 2011 the new government was announced. On 30 March 2011 the new president Thein Sein (who had been prime minister in the previous government) was sworn in, and the new cabinet, whose members were chosen by the president, took office (TNI and BCN, February 2011, p.3, BBC News, 30 March 2011; AP, 30 March 2011).

Many observers reported flaws in the election process, including significant manipulation of the vote count (ICG, 7 March 2011, p.2). The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), created by the previous government, continued to dominate politics in Myanmar along with the armed forces. However, the new Constitution, which was promulgated in 2008 and implemented with the November 2010 elections, provides for some changes. While in the pre-election regime all political power was in the hands of Than Shwe, chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), power is now divided between different office holders and power centres. In addition, new political structures have been introduced and some powers have been devolved to regional- and state-level bodies. This has potentially opened up limited, but unprecedented political space for opposition and ethnic minority parties (ICG, 7 March 2011, pp.1, 5-7; TNI and BCN, December 2010, pp.1-2).

The national legislature and most regional/state legislatures are characterised by large USDP majorities. In both houses of parliament the USDP holds just below 60 per cent of the seats and members of the Myanmar Armed Forces occupy the 25 per cent in both houses, as provided for in the 2008 Constitution (ICG, 7 March 2011, p.18). The *Tatmadaw* continues to control politics in Myanmar in important ways. In addition to the parliamentary seats reserved for members of the military and the fact that the top political positions are occupied by former military leaders, the Commander-in-Chief appoints the following office holders, which will all be members of the yet-to-be-formed National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), expected to be the most influential executive body under the 2008 Constitution:

- One of the two vice presidents,
- The Deputy Commander-in-Chief,

- The Defence Minister (a military officer),
- The Minister for Home Affairs (a military officer),
- The Minister for Border Affairs (a military officer).

Furthermore, the Commander-in-Chief is himself a member of the NDSC, which – in combination with the above-mentioned appointments – means that he controls six out of eleven votes within that body. In addition, he has independent decision-making power in the area of military justice and all other military issues (ICG, 7 March 2011, pp.4-5, 7, 18; TNI and BCN, December 2010, pp.1-2).

In all states with non-Burman majority populations except Kayah/Karenni State (but including other conflict and ceasefire areas in eastern Myanmar) some representatives of ethnic minority parties are members of state or regional legislatures. However, some ethnic parties were excluded from the elections (TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, p.7; ICG, 7 March 2011, pp.2, 17; TNI and BCN, December 2010, p.7; TNI and BCN, February 2011, p.11).

Self-administered areas below state level have been created in Shan State for the Danu, Kokang, Palaung, Pa-O and Wa ethnic groups and in Sagaing Region for the Naga ethnic group (ICG, 7 March 2011, p.6; TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.3). It was hoped that the ethnic minorities represented in state/regional parliaments would have some independence in policy-making concerning local issues, although a number of ethnic candidates elected to local parliaments were at the same time leaders of pro-government ethnic militia (TNI and BCN, December 2010, p.5; TNI and BCN, February 2011, p.5).

While the new president acknowledged the importance of a resolution to ethnic armed conflict and while there were reports about an end to the “self-reliance” policy, the *Tatmadaw* appeared to have continued its counterinsurgency strategy in ethnic areas (TNI and BCN, 26 May 2011, pp.2-3, 6). It remains to be seen whether the conflict parties will seize the opportunity for reconciliation and true power-sharing in the ethnic minority areas or whether ethnic and political divisions will continue to increase, as indicated by the resurgence of fighting in some of these areas since the elections (TNI and BCN, December 2010, p.5; TNI and BCN, February 2011, pp.5, 10, 14).

Recent fighting

Fighting between opposition NSAGs and government forces in recent months affected Kayin/Karen, Shan and Kachin States and reportedly displaced thousands of people within Myanmar and across the border into Thailand and China.

In November 2010, one day after the elections, fighting between the DKBA-5th Brigade and the Myanmar Armed Forces in the town of Myawaddy in Kayin/Karen State led to new displacement, with an estimated total of up to 20,000 people fleeing into Thailand within two days (NYT, 8 November 2010; UNHCR, 9 November 2010; IRIN, 9 November 2010). Later clashes between NSAGs and the *Tatmadaw* involved the DKBA-5th Brigade and the KNU/KNLA in Kayin/Karen State, and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) in southern Shan State. In both States, fighting was ongoing in June 2011 (KIC, 18 June 2011; Shan Herald Agency for News, 13 June 2011).

In February 2011 several ethnic non-state armed groups (NSAGs) based in eastern Myanmar that refused to transform into BGF formed a military and political alliance, the United Nationalities Federal Council (Union of Burma) (UNFC-UB). The grouping emerged from the Committee for the Emergence of a Federal Union, a smaller alliance created shortly before elections in November 2010. It includes the following ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups (Mizzima News, 6 November

2010; TNI and BCN, December 2010, p.8; Shan Herald Agency for News, 17 February 2011; DVB, 18 February 2011; Ethnic Nationalities Conference, 20 February 2011; TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.44):

- Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)/Kachin Independence Army (KIA),
- Kachin National Organisation (KNO),
- New Mon State Party (NMSP),
- Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) (a breakaway faction of the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N)),
- Karen National Union (KNU)/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA),
- Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP),
- Chin National Front (CNF),
- National United Party of Arakan (NUPA),
- Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF),
- PaO National Liberation Organisation (PNLO),
- Wa National Organisation (WNO),
- Lahu Democratic Union (LDU).

Information on internal displacement resulting from recent fighting was scarce. In late November 2010, 2,000 people newly displaced were believed to be hiding in the jungle in Kayin/Karen State (IRIN, 29 November 2010). Fighting between the KIO/KIA and the *Tatmadaw* in Kachin State in June 2011 reportedly displaced thousands of people within Myanmar, in addition to 2,000 who were said to have fled into China (ReliefWeb, 17 June 2011).

IDP POPULATION FIGURES

Numbers of IDPs

There are no comprehensive figures of the number of people internally displaced due to armed conflict or human rights violations in Myanmar, and it is very difficult to assess the scale of such internal displacement in the country. The available figures only cover those IDPs who live in rural areas of south-eastern Myanmar controlled by or accessible to various NSAGs that facilitate the collection of data, and there is no way of verifying them independently. Very little or no information exists on the impacts of armed conflict, human rights violations and displacement on civilians for areas controlled by the government or by government-allied NSAGs (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.30; Chatham House, September 2010, p.6).

UNHCR used an estimate of 451,000 IDPs in Myanmar as its planning figure for 2010, while the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) estimated that in July 2010 at least 446,000 IDPs were living in the 37 surveyed townships (administrative sub-districts) in southern Shan, Kayah/Karenni, Kayin/Karen and Mon States and Bago/Pegu and Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Regions. Of those IDPs, it was believed that 125,000 were living in relocation villages in government-controlled areas, 115,000 dispersed in hiding areas in the jungle, and 206,000 living in areas administered by ceasefire NSAGs. The TBBC also reported that an estimated 73,000 of the IDPs in south-eastern Myanmar were newly displaced between August 2009 and July 2010, including some 26,000 people in northern Karen areas and some 8,000 in southern Mon areas (UNHCR, January 2010; TBBC, 28 October 2010, p.20).

Information on internal displacement resulting from recent fighting was scarce, although available reports indicate that thousands were displaced in Kayin/Karen, Shan and Kachin States and into Thailand and China between November 2010 and June 2011 (IRIN, 29 November 2010; Shan Herald Agency for News, 13 June 2011; ReliefWeb, 17 June 2011).

It was believed that more than 500,000 IDPs were living in eastern Myanmar, including in urban areas and mixed administration or “grey” areas (TBBC, 28 October 2010, p.20). An unknown but significant number of IDPs were believed to be living in other parts of Myanmar. Estimates of the total number of IDPs in the country – including many long-term IDPs who had not reached a durable solution – went up to several million (RSC, February 2007, pp.5-6).

PHYSICAL SECURITY AND INTEGRITY

Landmines

According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GP), every human being has a right to life (GP 10) and to physical, mental and moral integrity (GP 11). In Myanmar, the widespread use of landmines in areas affected by armed conflict endangered the physical security of civilians, including IDPs.

Government forces as well as non-state Armed Groups (NSAGs), including the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)/Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Karen National Union (KNU)/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA), used anti-personnel mines in 2009 and 2010. New laying of mines was linked to the government's order to ceasefire groups in April 2009 to transform into BGF and the resulting increase in fighting (ICBL, 27 October 2010; GC/DCA, January 2011, p.13; UN GA, 15 September 2010, pp.14-15).

Some displaced and other civilians were also reported to have laid mines as a self-protection measure. In the north of Kayin/Karen State, one NSAG allegedly provided civilians with mines. There were reports that members of *gher der* (or local "home guard" groups) requested and received anti-personnel mines from the KNU/KNLA, apparently to protect villages and agricultural fields (GC/DCA, January 2011, pp.13-14; KHRG, 31 August 2010, pp.90, 94; Chatham House, September 2010, p.51). Furthermore, there were reports of landmines used for "business" purposes to protect installations such as sites where natural resources were extracted, hydropower dams, and bridges (GC/DCA, January 2011, p.13).

While the Myanmar Armed Forces (*Tatmadaw*) appeared to have used fewer mines than in previous years, the KNU/KNLA and the DKBA laid more mines as fighting between the two groups increased. The KNU/KNLA reportedly warned civilians about mines that it had laid (Chatham House, September 2010, p.50). On the other hand, the KNU/KNLA did not remove mines from the area around the Ler Per Her IDP camp in Kayin/Karen State when it withdrew from there in mid-2009. The DKBA was reported to have warned villagers in early 2010 about its plans to plant mines in Myawaddy township in Kayin/Karen State, but it did not issue warnings when it planted mines in Bu Tho and Dweh Loh townships during 2009 (ICBL, 27 October 2010; UNGA, 10 March 2010, p.14).

State production of mines in Myanmar included detectable and non-detectable blast and fragmentation anti-personnel mines. The KNU/KNLA, the DKBA, the Karenni Army, and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) were reported to have produced blast and fragmentation mines, as well as Claymore-type directional fragmentation mines, mines with anti-handling fuses, and explosive booby-traps. NSAGs also seized mines that the *Tatmadaw* had planted as well as mines from *Tatmadaw* stockpiles, and they acquired mines through illicit channels (ICBL, 27 October 2010).

It has been said that "homemade" mines, or Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), which are frequently used by NSAGs, expire after a period of six months because the batteries powering the detonator do not last longer than that, while the factory-made mines used by the *Tatmadaw* remain functional for decades. However, mine action NGOs have pointed out that IEDs can still explode with devastating effect even after the actual detonation mechanism has become dysfunctional (GC/DCA, January 2011, p.13).

While comprehensive information on mine contamination and numbers of people killed or injured were not available, some contamination, mainly with anti-personnel mines, was identified in 33 townships in Chin, Kachin, Kayin/Karen, Kayah/Karenni, Mon, Rakhine/Arakan and Shan States and in Bago/Pegu and Tanintharyi Regions, with all townships in Kayin/Karen and Kayah/Karenni States affected. Available information on mine incidents comes from the government publication *New Light of Myanmar* as well as from various NGOs and other sources (ICBL, 27 October 2010).

Mine clearance by the *Tatmadaw*, NSAGs and non-governmental groups was sporadic, and no specific effort was made towards humanitarian demining (GC/DCA, January 2011, p.24). The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) were reported to have removed mines and turned them over to opposition NSAGs (ICBL, 27 October 2010). NSAGs also reportedly cleared areas of mines in order to allow IDPs and humanitarian organisations to pass, although these mines may subsequently have been laid elsewhere (GC/DCA, January 2011, p.24). In his Progress Report of March 2010, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar expressed his “grave concern” about the *Tatmadaw* reportedly having forced civilians to clear mines “without training or protective equipment” or to work as porters in mine-contaminated areas (UNGA, 10 March 2010, p.14).

BASIC NECESSITIES OF LIFE

Food and water

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement recall IDPs' right to an "adequate standard of living" (GP 18 (1)) and to access to "essential food and potable water" (GP 18 (2a)). In rural south-eastern Myanmar, civilians including IDPs reportedly did not have full access to these rights. Food scarcity was said to be the biggest problem in many areas.

Food insecurity was particularly high in 2010 in Northern Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Shan States and in Magway Region. Almost nine per cent of children under five were acutely malnourished (WFP, January 2011). Internally displaced children were likely to be particularly affected.

IDPs in hiding in the south-eastern parts of conflict zones have constantly been moving, making agricultural activity difficult and limiting their access to safe drinking water. Some IDPs have reportedly raised crops on several fields in different locations, to maintain their access to food in case some crops were destroyed or confiscated. There have been reports of authorities confiscating food from IDPs in relocation sites, which was then rationed and distributed among all IDPs in the site (Chatham House, September 2010, pp.34, 36).

Health, nutrition and sanitation

According to Guiding Principle 18 (2d) the Myanmar authorities are to provide internally displaced people (IDPs) with "[...] Essential medical services and sanitation" or otherwise make sure IDPs have access to these. Wounded and sick IDPs and IDPs with disabilities are to receive appropriate medical care as well as have access to psychological and social care when necessary, as stipulated by GP 19 (1). However, according to the information available, people displaced by the armed conflict in south-eastern Myanmar only had limited access to these rights.

According to a survey in late 2008 and early 2009, health indicators for Bago/Pegu Region, Kayah/Karenni State, Kayin/Karen State, Mon State, Shan State and Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Region, including conflict-affected areas where large numbers of IDPs live, were significantly worse than for the rest of the country (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 240 women were estimated to have died from a maternal cause for each 100,000 live births in 2008 in Myanmar (WHO, 2010, p.25). By contrast, the maternal mortality rate for south-eastern Myanmar was believed to be three times as high (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010, p.22). The estimated infant mortality rate for Myanmar was 54 deaths for each 1,000 live births in 2009, while the under-five mortality rate was 71 deaths per 1,000 live births (UNICEF, 2010, p.13). For south-eastern Myanmar, however, both rates were estimated to be significantly higher, with an infant mortality rate of 73 deaths per 1,000 live births and an under-five mortality rate of 138 deaths per 1,000 live births (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010, p.22).

Malaria was reported to be the cause of almost a quarter of deaths among the surveyed population in south-eastern Myanmar and for more than a quarter of deaths among children below the age of five, followed by diarrhoea and acute respiratory infection. The risk of severe acute malnutrition was said to be 4.8 times higher for internally displaced children than for non-displaced children (BMA, NHEC and BPHWT, 19 October 2010, pp.22, 30, 36).

PROPERTY, LIVELIHOODS, EDUCATION AND OTHER ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Livelihoods

According to Guiding Principle 22 (1b), IDPs have a “right to seek freely opportunities for employment and to participate in economic activities”. However, civilians in rural south-eastern Myanmar, including IDPs, were said to have limited livelihood options, and there were reports of forced labour.

Agriculture, in particular rice cultivation, was an important means for people living in rural south-eastern Myanmar, including IDPs, to ensure their livelihood and to provide for food for themselves and their families. People having fled from the plains to the hills had to shift from irrigated rice cultivation – which allowed for surplus production – to slash-and-burn cultivation. Because larger populations had to share the limited agricultural land in the hilly areas, the slash-and-burn cycles became shorter, leading to lower crop yields due to reduced fertility of the soil. The constant movement of IDPs in hiding sites made it harder for them to pursue their agricultural work, and they had limited or no access to markets and other means of livelihood (Chatham House, September 2010, pp.19, 27-28, 33).

IDPs staying in relocation sites were reportedly restricted in their movements, which made it more difficult for them to access agricultural land elsewhere or to travel to markets to sell their products or buy food. Some apparently had to pay bribes to *Tatmadaw* soldiers at checkpoints. In other areas, people reportedly had to pay tributes of money, livestock or crops, or submit to forced labour, to various actors, including the government and/or NSAGs (TBBC, 31 October 2009, p.26; CPCS, June 2010, p.90; Chatham House, September 2010, pp.19; 29; UN GA, 7 March 2011, p.18).

Education

According to Guiding Principle 23 “every human being has the right to education”, and Article 28.1 (a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Myanmar is a party, provides for free primary education. However, there were reports that access to education was limited in Myanmar, including in conflict- and displacement-affected areas.

Among all households covered in a recent survey in rural south-eastern Myanmar, fewer than half of all children between the ages of five and 13 were regularly going to school. Reasons for dropping out included insecurity due to ongoing conflict and inability to pay school fees (TBBC, 28 October 2010, p.29; UN GA, 7 March 2011, p.14).

Primary education all over Myanmar – with the exception of monastery schools – has been associated with significant informal costs. Like other poor families, displaced families in conflict-affected areas were particularly affected. In addition, it was reported that many schools in conflict areas were not functional, and there was a lack of teachers, as many were unwilling to move to remote areas (UN GA, 7 March 2011, pp.13-14).

Children belonging to ethnic minorities, including displaced children, were also facing problems related to language when it came to education. The language of instruction in all government schools in Myanmar must be Burmese. Teaching in ethnic minority languages and bilingual

education are not permitted as part of the regular curriculum (UN GA, 7 March 2011, p.14). Some ethnic minority children were reported not to attend school or to drop out because they did not speak Burmese. Burmese also dominates secondary and university education as well as large parts of the job market in Myanmar, which puts children and students from ethnic minorities at a disadvantage (CPCS, June 2010, pp.41, 42, 71, 72, 234, 273).

There were reports of children being recruited by NSAGs. For example, in Kachin State, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the political wing of the ceasefire NSAG Kachin Independence Army (KIA), was running its own schools, and there were reports of recruitment of children into the KIO via those schools (CPCS, June 2010, p.235).

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

National and international response and humanitarian access

Myanmar ranks 132nd among 169 countries in UNDP's Human Development Index, making it one of the "least developed countries" and one of the poorest countries in Asia. While the percentage of the population below the poverty line fell from 32 to 26 per cent between 2005 and 2010, inequality and disparities between regions have augmented. The country is rich in natural resources and receives significant revenues from their extraction, but these reportedly do not appear in the national budget. Investment is low, and productive assets are lacking (WFP, January 2011; UNGA, 7 March 2011, p.16).

Myanmar does not have a national IDP policy or legislation, and there has been no official recognition of the existence of internal displacement caused by armed conflict or human rights violations in the country. The access of UN agencies and other international humanitarian organisations to most areas in south-eastern Myanmar affected by armed conflict and displacement has improved somewhat since early 2010, but remains restricted.

In a situation of limited access, two different approaches to the provision of humanitarian relief in Myanmar have prevailed. Humanitarian organisations based on the Thai side of the Thailand-Myanmar border have been able to provide humanitarian relief, mainly to ethnic Karen IDPs in conflict-affected border areas of south-eastern Myanmar, while IDPs of other ethnicities and in other conflict-affected areas have received less or no support. The work of border-based organisations has included data collection and public advocacy, including for greater support by international donors. Many of them have had to rely on more or less strong ties with opposition NSAGs, which have provided them with access to IDP areas, security and logistical support. However, this raises concerns about the independence of such assistance and the extent to which it may contribute to war economies (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.30; Chatham House, September 2010, pp.7, 40-41, 63-64; FMR, 22 April 2008, p.17).

The approach taken by international humanitarian organisations and national and local NGOs based inside Myanmar has been to cautiously engage in humanitarian operations in conflict-affected areas. International organisations have been able to reach conflict IDPs in south-eastern Myanmar sometimes in collaboration with local community-based organisations, and sometimes directly (TNI and BCN, March 2011, p.31). In 2010, the Government of Myanmar and UNHCR signed a two-year memorandum of understanding about assistance to conflict-affected communities in the south-east of the country, covering the provision of health services, education and water, shelter, livelihoods and skills training. At the end of the year, UNHCR was providing assistance and protection to about 62,000 IDPs (UN GA, 7 March 2011, p.17; UNHCR, December 2010, p.233; UNHCR, 20 June 2011, p.39).

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