

Burma Refugees Commission Report to Board of General Ministries, November 2018

On September 21, 2018, a delegation of six people did an advocacy trip to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the U.S. State Department, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) in Washington D.C. The delegation included;

1. Dr. Roy Medley, ABC USA General Secretary Emeritus
2. Rev. Florence Li, National Coordinator for Asian Ministries, Intercultural Ministries; Burma Refugees Commission
3. Rev. Leslie Turley, Director of East Asia and Japan, International Ministries; Burma Refugees Commission
4. Rev. Dr. Jum Maw San Awng, Pastor of Kachin Baptist Church, Indianapolis, Kachin Baptist Churches USA; Burma Refugees Commission
5. Mr. Peter Thawng Hmung, President, Chin Community of Indiana
6. Mr. Do Khan Khup, Burmese American Community of Indiana

The purpose of the advocacy was to raise concern regarding UNHCR (in Kuala Lumpur) issued a "Community Messaging on Chin Cessation Process" on June 13, 2018 indicated the situation in Chin State is stable and secure from a refugee protection perspective, and that the Chin refugees are no longer in need of international protection from UNHCR. Began on August 1, 2018, UNHCR decided to proceed with the process of individual cessation of refugee status. There were only two options given to the Chin refugees when approaching to renew their card.

Option 1

Extension of existing UNHCR identity card until December 31, 2019 waiving the need for an individual interview. Individual will remain under UNHCR's protection until December 31, 2019. As of January 1, 2020, the individual refugee status will automatically cease and UNHCR identity cards will no longer renewed.

Option 2

Individuals may request for an interview if they feel they are still in need of international protection. The UNHCR identity card will be replaced by a letter confirming refugee status and a final decision will be made within approximately two months. Based on the final decision, status will either automatically cease and the UNHCR document will no longer be extended, or refugee status will confirm along with further card renewal.

The cessation process that will be completed by December 31, 2019 have generated dissents from the Chins in Malaysia and other countries. The Independent Chin Community in Kuala Lumpur led numerous community groups together on August 13-15 and came up with a position statement. They asked for help from American Baptist, thus, the Burma Refugees Commission took on the concern and address the issue with UNHCR and PRM. On November 5, the Commission delegates and invited representatives will meet with Ambassador Brownback, Director of Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Religious Freedom from the State Department to express the concern of security in repatriation. We will focus on recent military invasion upon the WA and Shan State in north east of Myanmar, the on-going conflict against the Kachin and ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya.

Submitted by Florence Li