

**Item 06e BI- Report of Delegation/Living Letters Visit
(RE: Feb. 2015 trip to Malaysia, Thailand, Burma)
1202:6/15**

American Baptist Churches/National Council of Churches US
Living Letters Visit to Malaysia/Thailand/Burma
January 27-February 22, 2015

Participants:

Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary of American Baptist Churches;
Mr. James Winkler, President/General Secretary of National Council of Churches of Christ USA;
Rev. Ler Htoo, General Secretary of Karen Baptist Churches USA;
Rev. C. Duh Kam, Executive Minister of Chin Baptist Churches USA;
Rev. Florence Li of American Baptist Home Mission Society;
Rev. Dr. Paul and Gail Aita, Special Assistants to ABC International Ministries;
Mr. Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director of Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center, Chiang Mai, Thailand;
Professor (Ret) Rev, Edmund ZaBik of Myanmar Institute of Theology.
We were also accompanied in Burma by Rev. Dr. Pau, General Secretary of the Myanmar Baptist Convention.

Contacts made during our visit:

Malaysia (Rev. Florence Li)

- Jan 27 -- Richard J. Towle, UNHCR Representative in Kuala Lumpur
- Jan 28 -- Hrang Peng Ling; John Bawi Luai Thanga & leaders from Falam Refugees Committee
- Jan 29 -- Lum Hkawng Lalaw & Hkawng Dau Zahkung from Kachin Refugees Committee
- Jan 29 -- Leaders from the Alliance of Chin Refugees

Thailand

- Jan 29-31 -- Mr. Khu Oorey, General Secretary of United Nationalities Federal Council (with Rev. Medley and Mr. Hmung)
- Jan 29-31 -- Mr. Laja, General Secretary of KIO (with Rev Medley and Mr Hmung)
- Jan 31-Feb 1 -- Rev. Dr. Robert Htwe and two KNU representatives re: Border Camps
- Feb 1 -- Sunday worship with Burmese migrant workers at Bangkok Christ Church
- Feb 1 -- Afternoon visit with Burmese migrant workers (in another mission location)
- Feb 2 -- Merille Girard, UNHCR on refugee camps and repatriation situation
- Feb 2 -- Charge d'affaires, Patrick Murphy, US Embassy
- Feb 2 -- Alistair Boulton, Assistant Regional Representative (Protection), UNHCR

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Burma - Rangoon/Yangon

- Feb 4 -- Mr. Patrick Loo Nee, President of the Myanmar Council of Churches, church leaders and staff
- Feb 4 -- Rev. Sansom and leaders of Karen Baptist Convention
- Feb 5 -- Rev. Dr. Yam Kho Pau and Leaders of Myanmar Baptist Convention; Karen Baptist Theological Seminary
- Feb 5 -- Rev. Dr. Samuel Ling, President of Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) together with Drs. Maung Maung Yin and Saw Hlaing Bwa of the Judson Research Center at MIT, faculty and students
- Feb 10 -- Minister U Aung Min, President Thien Sien's representative in the cease fire talks and peace process, Director of Myanmar Peace Center
- Feb 10 -- Daw Aung San Su Kyi - Nobel Peace Prize Recipient and head of the Democratic opposition party
- Feb 11 -- Ambassador Derek Mitchell & staff, US Embassy

Burma - Myitkyina, Kachin State

- Feb 6 -- Rev. Dr. Samson (Jinghpaw Hkalup Ginjaw), General Secretary of Kachin Baptist Convention, greetings and assembly, feet washing, dinner, dance program
- Feb 7 -- Pastors/church members from across Kachin State in assembly;
- Feb 7 -- visit 4 IDP camps, managers and residents; water dam; Kachin Ministers Council meeting
- Feb 8 -- delegates preached at worship service at different locations
- Feb 8 -- Met relatives of Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin and Maran Lu Ra, Kachin Baptist teacher volunteers raped and murdered in Shan State, Jan 2015
- Feb 8 -- Leaders of the Independent Investigatory Commission formed by citizens to investigate the circumstances of Ing's death
- Feb 8 -- Peace Talk Creation Group, an independent group which advocates for and assists in bringing together representatives of the government and the armed ethnic organizations for cease fire talks
- Feb 9 -- Met Mr. La John Ngan Sai, Chief Minister of the Kachin State
- Feb 9 -- KIO Technical Advisory Team
- Feb 9 -- Met father of Ja Seng Ing who was allegedly killed by military fire

Delegation's Mission:

Phase 1:

The delegation visited Malaysia and Thailand on the first leg of its trip to explore the issues which refugees from Burma who are living in the Thai Border Camps or in

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Malaysia. These visits were prompted by 1) concern among Burmese nationals in the US about the status of the camps, issues related to repatriation from the Thai camps, and the policies of the governments of Thailand, Myanmar, the US as well as the UNHCR regarding the camps, and 2) conditions in Malaysia (see Florence's report)

Our Findings:

- The plight of the refugees in Malaysia is worsening as they are again subject to a resurgent attempt to arrest and deport them, even taking people from hospital beds. Living conditions are squalid and diseases (including HIV/AIDS is spreading).
- The UNHCR is no longer resettling Chin refugees from Malaysia saying the conflict in the Chin State has ended
- The UNHCR is focusing its resettlement efforts on the Kachin and Rohingya refugees in Malaysia
- Many NGO's and governments who have been providing services and food to the camps are withdrawing their support and relocating to Myanmar. Food rations have been greatly reduced and the future of the camp residents is viewed by them with anxiety
- The US has closed the resettlement of refugees using the group refugee status category. A "last call" was issued in late 2014 for all those who had been registered by the UN in the one and only registration allowed by the Thai government to ask to be resettled in the US. There are still enough people who responded that it will take 2-3 years to resettle them all.
- The US will now only resettle camp residents based upon proof of individual refugee status or family reunification.
- The US has increased its aid support four-fold for those in the camps
- Neither the UNHCR nor the US government and to this point neither the Thai government or the Myanmar government support forced repatriation
- All parties voice that before repatriation is a possibility, issues such as a secure cease fire and peace; clearing of mines, land ownership rights, economic support, and citizenship credentialing must be accomplished
- The UNHCR representatives are more optimistic about the timeline to achieve these than is our delegation

Our Recommendations:

- That the US government strongly advocate with the Malaysian government for improved humanitarian conditions for the refugees and that human trafficking be stopped.
- That NGO's and governments be encouraged to not reduce their support for the camps until conditions suitable for repatriation are met

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- That the UN and the US as well as others carefully monitor the conditions in Burma and certify that at least the minimum conditions required for repatriation have been met before supporting the return of folks back to Burma
- That representatives from the camps be fully engaged in negotiations about their future

Delegation's Mission :

Phase 2 - to ascertain where the Cease Fire and Peace Process is at this moment.

Our findings

- When asked what was blocking the progress in cease fire and peace talks we consistently heard it is the lack of trust, especially in the Kachin State where a 17 year old cease fire was unilaterally breached by the military and where the worst violence and atrocities are now occurring
- Representatives of the Armed Ethnic Organizations in private conversations with Rev. Medley and Mr. Winkler affirmed their commitment to peace and a desire to sign a cease fire that guarantees equality, democracy and federalism
- U Aung Min's role in the cease fire negotiations is counterbalanced by the representative from the military. That plus the lack of trust by the Armed Ethnic Organizations (AEO's) makes progress quite difficult
- Considerable progress had been made through August of 2014 but in 2015 a new military representative was sent to the National Ceasefire Agreement talks with new demands
- The AEO's want to sign as a national cease fire agreement including all ethnic groups, rather than each group negotiating its own. They have named a National Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) to negotiate on their behalf.
- A ceasefire is essential before progress can be made in the larger peace process in Burma
- In addition to the ceasefire talks there are two related issues that are critical to the peace process. The first are proposed amendments to the constitution and the second are the elections scheduled for late October, early November
- The United States is heavily investing in processes to guarantee that the elections are free and fair including voter registration and education.
- The Baptist churches of Myanmar are also committed to doing voter registration and education
- The government has muddled the peace negotiation process by overloading it with participants. Aung San Su Kyi argues for a six party process in which her party is involved.
- The US is actively trying to help bring about a ceasefire in order to create a middle-ground in which political dialogue can take place.

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Our recommendations:

- That the Burmese government and military show good will and good faith by guaranteeing the principles of democracy, federalism and equality in the ceasefire agreement
- That both sides move quickly and boldly to sign a ceasefire to arrest the harm that is ongoing to the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons who have been forced from their homes and fields by the ongoing fighting
- That both sides take the bold move of declaring an immediate withdrawal from hostilities and creation of a buffer zone between the opposing forces
- That there be robust monitoring of the cease fire by an independent international force and that violators be held accountable for infractions
- That all political parties within Burma be invited to the political negotiations regarding the amendment of the constitution and the peace process
- That the United States continues to use its influence to reform the Burmese army so that it respects human rights and religious liberty and that it abides by a code of conduct recognized by the United Nations
- That the US support efforts to monitor both the ceasefire agreement and the upcoming elections
- That the Union and State governments fulfill their pledge to voter enrollment and education
- That there not be provision for advance voting given the abuse of them in 2010 when additional ballots continued to be brought forth in favor of the government party.

Delegation's Mission:

Phase 3 - to see and hear first-hand concerns about human rights and religious liberty violations and the conditions in which the IDP's live. We were not allowed to visit camps outside the government controlled area.

Our findings:

- The IDP situation arose when the military breached the 17 year-old peace agreement with the Kachin in June 2011 by attacking villages and displacing hundreds of thousands
- There are ongoing attacks by the military against the Kachin that undermine any confidence of the Kachin in negotiations
- Rape and torture continue to be used as weapons of war by the military
- The largely Christian population of the Kachin and Chin States protest the government's active promotion of Buddhism
- Ethnic Christians face a double layer of discrimination in positions they can hold - one related to their being ethnics and the second their being Christian

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- The military is still ordering the removal of crosses which have stood for decades in the Chin Hills and replacing them with Buddhist shrines
- There is a deep cry for peace with justice and the realization that without peace there will be no enduring peace in Myanmar
- The IDP's living in camps around Myitkyina live in very cramped conditions but there is a great deal of support through the Kachin Baptist Convention, the Roman Catholic Church, the UN and NGO's but funds are not guaranteed and are always stretched thin
- Camp residents continue to express concern for their safety and note that members of the military and military intelligence appear in the camps periodically
- Efforts have been made to provide safe drinking water and sanitary facilities, food, and medical care
- Many of the people in the camps, especially the children, have been traumatized by the violence they experienced by the assaults and their subsequent dislocation living in the forests for months before arriving at the camps
- The education provided for the children of the camps is not adequate
- Drugs are a major problem in the Kachin State

Our recommendations:

- That the government of Myanmar support independent and transparent investigations of the ongoing atrocities alleged against the military including the rape and murder of Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin and Maran Lu Ra, the shooting and death of Ja Seng Ing, and the recent killing of four Kachin men whose burned bodies were found just before our arrival.
- The repeal of the law which allows the military to sue those who accuse military personnel of crimes as in the case of the father of Ja Seng Ing
- We commend the churches, NGO's and UN for the work they are doing with IDP's in the Kachin State
- The IDP camp situation remains precarious. Although needs in Syria, Africa, and elsewhere are very serious, we urge they not be permitted to subsume the situation in Burma.
- We urge that the Union and State governments and the AEO's provide guaranteed safe access by the UN and other recognized groups to aid the IDP's in the non-government controlled areas
- We urge the churches to provide support for efforts by the KBC and others in introducing into the education of the children a respect for differences in religion and ethnicity
- We urge President Thien Sien and members of Parliament to turn back legislative efforts that discriminate against minority religions in Myanmar in conformity with the

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Union Constitution and the UN's Declaration of Human Rights to which they are signatories

Feb 13-21 -- Visit Southern Chin State – Roy Medley, Paul & Gail Aita, C Duh Kam
Their findings & recommendations will appear at later date.

All details of meetings are recorded separately by Gail and edited by Florence in a separate document.