

Burma Refugees Commission Report for BGM June 2019 Meeting

Since UNHCR issued a community message to the Chin refugee communities in Malaysia in June 13, 2018 to end the protection by December 31, 2019, there were numerous advocacy efforts to halt the decision made by the Coalition of Chin Refugee Committee in Malaysia, the Coalition of Burma Ethnic in Malaysia (COBEM), the Chin Human Rights Organization, the Chin communities overseas and in the U.S., and the Burma Refugees Commission of ABCUSA.

On January 4-9, Roy Medley, General Secretary Emeritus visited Kachin State and UNHCR in Bangkok to advocate for the Kachin Internal Displaced People and Burma refugees in Thailand and Malaysia. On January 8-17, 2019, a delegation of the Commission members, Florence Li and Leslie Turley together with Marsha Scipio and four executive members - Joan Friesen, Robin Stoops, Doug Avilesbernal and Marie Onwubuariri, in addition to two International missionaries, Jeni Pedzinski and Ann Borquist made a discovery and advocacy trip to Malaysia and Burma.

A follow-up visit on February 12, 2019 with Chin community leaders and Commission members visited Ambassador Brownback at the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labors. Through various advocacy efforts, UNHCR Bangkok office finally announced the reversed decision and sent an email to Roy Medley on March 27. Below is the explanation from Emily Bojovic.

Dear Roy,

On March 14, 2019, UNHCR announced the discontinuation of the individual review of status for Chin refugees globally. The organization is very grateful for the candid and constructive dialogue with Chin refugees and their advocates while the individual review process was underway. In that spirit of cooperation and dialogue, I write in order to provide more detail on the recent decision and its implications.

The organization's commitment from the beginning of the individual review exercise was to continuously monitor developments in Chin State and to adapt our position if circumstances warranted it. UNHCR has been carefully monitoring developments in and around Chin State since the individual review process was announced mid-last year. We have examined reports, assessments, and media accounts in the public domain, consulted advocates, and met with individuals and organizations in Chin State. Additionally, we have cooperated closely in an updating of country of origin information by an independent entity, whose report has just been made public.

Through these efforts and with the deterioration of the security environment in Chin State and the Sagaing Region since the beginning of 2019, we have concluded that the individual review of protection needs for Chin refugees is no longer warranted.

Pending the termination of individual review procedures, UNHCR offices delayed issuance of any final decisions on status. As a result, no Chin refugee lost refugee status during this process. Access to

protection, assistance, and other services was maintained throughout the period of the individual review.

With the discontinuation of the individual review process, Chin refugees will maintain their refugee status until a durable solution has been identified. This does not preclude individual Chin refugees seeking voluntarily to return to Myanmar if they wish to do so. UNHCR will support such efforts in line with the voluntary repatriation package outlined in counselling during the individual review, including support for the reacquisition of identity and travel documents.

Chin refugees already identified and being processed for third country resettlement will continue to be eligible for this solution. New referrals for resettlement will take place only in individual cases, in line with UNHCR's global criteria and regional priorities and on par with other refugee groups.

UNHCR will also continue to advocate for Chin refugees to achieve a legal and protected status in the countries of asylum and for the right to work. Where feasible, and if refugees voluntarily opt for a change in status, UNHCR will support efforts to transition from refugee to legal migrant status.

UNHCR offices in states hosting Chin refugees have begun informing the affected refugee and asylum-seeker communities, governments, service providers and other partners about the discontinuation of the individual review process and of the continued need for international protection for recognized Chin refugees beyond 31 December 2019. UNHCR will reach out to communities with further information and urge communities in turn to reach out to us for the same.

We are very appreciative of your advocacy on behalf of the Chin community and hope that UNHCR may be able to continue to rely on your engagement as we move forward towards solutions for this population of concern.

With best wishes,

Emily

We are grateful for all the efforts and prayers from our mission partners.

Submitted by:
Florence Li
May 28, 2019