

BURMA REFUGEES RESETTLEMENT REPORT

March 2009

Background

Adoniram Judson, the first American missionary landed as a Baptist in the country of Burma nearly 200 years ago. Subsequent mission work over the decades brought many ethnic people such as the Karen, Chin, Kachin, Falam, Hakka and others to Christ along with the Burmese. Unfortunately, a military government took over control in the early 1960s and American Baptist missionaries were no longer allowed in the country. Moreover, the military regime began exerting ever harsher control over many ethnic minorities resulting in hundreds of thousands of ethnic Karens, Chins, Kachins, Shan and other ethnic groups fleeing to the mountains to hide or to neighboring countries to find a way to survive.

To date, 9 refugee camps housing over 150,000 Karen and Karenni stretch up and down Thailand near the border of Burma. Over 100,000 Chin refugees live in Malaysia and different parts of India. After decades of refugee life in camps, and no apparent change coming to Burma, the U.S. State Department in cooperation with the United Nations and the Thai government began offering the option of resettlement to Karen and Chin refugees. As a result, Church World Service along with other resettlement agencies have begun taking the first of what will likely be 10s of thousands of refugees and settled them in various cities around the US and in 8 other countries.

The Judson legacy and the mission footprints left upon the Burmese people, cause many of the refugees to seek out a church home with the American Baptist family. Their journey only ends when they can find a church home. For many of our congregations, as the Karen and Chin enter the life of their church, the excitement of mission work comes alive again and so does the mission spirit. The church is revitalized and strengthened!

Burma Refugees Task Force

In response to refugee needs and local church requests, the **Burma Refugees Task Force** was set up in early Spring of 2007. The Task Force is a joint effort of the Office of the General Secretary, International Ministries, National Ministries, local church pastors and American Baptist Women. Together in one mission, they team up to inform our larger ABC family, to encourage churches reaching out for sponsorship, to seek resources for refugee ministries and to build support networks among congregations.

The members of the Task Force are:

- Dr. Roy Medley, General Secretary, ABC USA.
- Duane & Marcia Binkley, International Ministries, Missionary to Thailand/U.S. (reassigned to work with the refugees in the U.S.).
- Rev. Florence Li, National Ministries, National Coordinator for Intercultural Ministries, Asian Churches Strategist.

- Rev. Stan Murray, International Ministries, Area Director for SE Asia/Japan
- Mr. Ken George, National Ministries, National Coordinator for Direct Human Services.
- Rev. Mark Caruana, Pastor, Tabernacle Baptist Church, Utica, NY
- Rev. Duh Kam, Pastor, Chin Baptist Mission Church, Silver Spring, MD
- Rev. Saw Ler Htoo, Pastor, Calvary Burmese Christian Fellowship, Calvary Baptist Church, Washington D.C.
- Rev. Thlaawr Bawihrin, Pastor, Zophei Christian Church, Indianapolis, IN
- Rev. Sandra L. DeMott Hasenauer, Associate Executive Director, American Baptist Women's Ministries.
- Htoo May, American Baptist Karen Women Organization

Currently, there are more than 60 groups of Karen, Chin, Kachin and Burmese are involved in ABC churches. On any given Sunday morning there are between 50 to 500 Burmese refugees worshipping in ABCUSA churches around the country.

Some ABCUSA Churches with Substantial Burmese Refugees

First Baptist Church St. Paul, MN, Rev. Bill Englund, Pastor
 Tabernacle Baptist Church, Utica, NY, Rev. Mark Caruana
 Kenmore Baptist Church, Buffalo, NY, Saw De Moe (Coordinator)
 Park Avenue Baptist Church, Rochester, NY, Rev. Sandra Hasenauer
 Karen Christian Church, Syracuse, NY, Rev. Paul Bailey
 Springfield Baptist Church, Akron, OH, Rev. Larry Baldrige
 North Shore Baptist Church, Chicago, IL, Rev. Carol McVetty & Rev. Doug Harris
 First Baptist Church Burmese Mission Fellowship, Oakland, CA, Rev. Lone-Wah Lazum
 Burmese Christian Community Church of Silicon Valley, San Jose, CA,
 Rev. Zau Ya Lahpai
 Chin Baptist Church of Indianapolis, IN, Rev. Stephen Kio;
 Fort Wayne Baptist (formerly First Baptist), Fort Wayne, IN, Rev. George Scripture
 Zophei Christian Church, Indianapolis, IN, Rev. Thlaawr Bawihrin
 Lai Baptist Church in Frederick, MD, Rev. Rollin Van Bik
 Chin Mission Baptist Church in Silver Spring, MD, Rev. Duh Kam
 Chin Baptist Church in Dallas, TX, Rev. Chum Awi
 First Baptist Church in Battle Creek, MI, Rev. David Laisum
 Chin Baptist Church of Battle Creek, MI, Rev. Van Thwang Lian
 First Kachin Baptist Church, Omaha, NE, Rev. Gam Lahpai

Events & Actions

- Published 3 articles and a new release to inform ABC about the influx of Burma refugees
- An executive letter from Aidsand's office to inform regions about refugee situation, 2007

- Submitted grant proposal to OGS/Budget Review Committee, secured grant and disbursed application process to churches
- Reviewed 34 grant applications and awarded 31 grants in May, 2008. A total of \$60,000 fund support received (\$30,000 from OGS/Mission Initiative Fund and \$30,000 from One Great Hour of Sharing).
- Embarked on a mission trip to the refugee camps in Thailand February 11-20, 2008
- Worked with Communication Council(OGS/IM/NM) to create a link and blog for the mission trip
- Gave oral reports and updates with hand outs at NM Plenary sessions in Jan and March 2008
- Written articles to “Mission In America”, “Children’s Corner” & “Christian Citizen”
- Convened Task Force meeting in January, March and May, 2008
- Conducted workshops at TABCOM & PBA
- Visited ABCOTS to build relationship for the refugee groups with the region
- Continue to connect refugee groups who desire to become ABC with regions and churches
- Work with Direct Human Service desk and NM Communication to create a webpage for Burma refugee resettlement, resources, networks, information, etc.
- Held the first Baptist Leaders from Burma conference in Dallas, TX on October 21-22, 2008.
- Coordinated an ABC delegation to visit Burma refugees in Malaysia and Thailand, and visit to Myanmar Baptist Convention in Myanmar on Feb. 10-25

Upcoming Events & Tasks

- Facilitate a gathering of Karen pastors/lay leaders at 2009 Biennial
- Offer a workshop about global immigration and refugee resettlement at 2009 Biennial
- Meet with Canadian Baptist Convention representatives for refugee ministries situation in Canada, May 5 & 6, 2009)
- Administrate second year grant from “Mission Initiative Fund” and OGHS and other offerings received.
- Work with NM Program Ministries for the hiring of a Burma/Karen/Chin speaking staff to serve as short term liaison for the refugee works
- Support and attend geographical gatherings of Karen and Chin events
- Provide workshop in partnership with Duane Binkley at World Mission Conference

Resources to learn more about Burma & Burma Refugees

www.karenkonnection.org

<http://www.chro.org/>

<http://www.tbtc.org/whatwedo/whatwedo-news.htm>

<http://www.drum.fastmail.fm/indextext.htm>

<http://www.churchworldservice.org/Immigration/index.html>

<http://www.abcthai.blogspot.com>

<http://www.friendsofburma.org>

<http://www.burmalibrary.org>

<http://www.freeburmarangers.org>

<http://www.burmaissues.org>

<http://www.prayforburma.org>

<http://Burmadigest.info>

<http://www.abc-usa.org>

<http://www.nationalministries.org>

<http://www.internationalministries.org>

**U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
Office of Refugee Admissions
2401 E Street NW
Suite L505**

Washington DC 20522

<http://www.refugees.org/blog/themes/USCRINetwork/network/resources/FY2004VolagDir.pdf>

Submitted by:

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