

Press Release: For immediate release

## **Briefing Paper: Voices of Refugees – Situation of Burma’s Refugees Along the Thailand-Burma Border**

(27 April 2015) Today, Burma Link and Burma Partnership launches a joint briefing paper, *Voices of Refugees – Situation of Burma’s Refugees Along the Thailand-Burma Border*, online. The briefing paper highlights how the voices of refugees continue to be neglected in Burma’s reform process.

By addressing diverse refugees’ concerns over the possibility of premature repatriation plans, ongoing armed conflict and displacement in Burma, steady decrease in funding in the camps coupled with recent enforced restriction on movement that are threatening their livelihood, the paper conveys the need for all actors to ensure meaningful and full participation of refugees and diverse Community Based Organizations working closely with their community in the planning and preparedness of their eventual return.

The Co-founder and current Program Director of Burma Link, Ariana Zarleen said, “In the light of the current fragile peace process and the unfavorable situation on the ground in Burma, any repatriation taking place under the current circumstance is likely to lead to involuntary return, either directly or indirectly through cutting off aid.”

These refugees’ voices of concern are based on real fears, as the ongoing conflict threatens peoples’ lives and the situation on the ground in Burma indicates increased militarization by Burma Army as human rights violations continue with impunity, while a fragile peace process threatens the sustainable return of refugees with dignity and in safety. Furthermore, over 643,000 people remain internally displaced in Burma, some living in potential refugee return areas and the country’s so-called reform continues to backslide.

Soe Aung, Working Group member of Burma Partnership and Foreign Affairs Secretary of Forum for Democracy in Burma said, “If the concerns of the refugees are unaddressed and the preconditions for safe and dignified return are not ensured, the refugees will again be caught in a cycle of conflict and displacement after their return. Repatriation should be a refugee-led voluntary operation since they are the primary stakeholders, and not enforced by actions and factors determined by others. Meaningful and inclusive participation of refugees in the decision making of the return process is the key to their sustainable return, and refugees should be provided ample space and time to make their decision regarding their future.”

The briefing paper was initially launched and presented by Soe Aung at the most recently convened Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples’ Forum 2015 in Malaysia, which took place between 22-24 April 2015.

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**Burma Partnership** is a network of organizations throughout the Asia-Pacific region supporting the collective efforts of all peoples working towards democracy, peace, and human rights in Burma. **Burma Link** upholds the voices of Burma’s ethnic nationalities and displaced people, and shares their voices and stories with local and global audiences.