



For Immediate Release

Refugee Youth Must Have the Opportunity to Participate in Burma's Transition

[Yangon, 22 February 2017] – Today, Burma Link, Karen Student Network Group (KSNG) and Karen Youth Organisation (KYO) launch a documentary, “Unrecognised Leaders, Tomorrow’s Hope: Raising the Voices of Forgotten Youth.” The documentary amplifies the voices of displaced ethnic youth on the Thailand-Burma border, highlighting their calls for inclusion in political processes and recognition of refugee education certificates.

The 55-minute documentary features stories of youth who have been educated in higher education institutions in the refugee camps and along the border, showing their capacity and aspirations to contribute as active citizens to drive change and promote peace and national reconciliation in Burma.

“The Burma Government and national and international education institutions should make every effort to recognise refugee education and allow for flexible pathways for refugee students to access further education,” said Leena Zieger, Founder and International Coordinator of Burma Link. “All actors should make sure that the immense human capacity that has developed over the years on the Thailand-Burma border is utilised and not side-lined,” she continued.

Currently, the future is uncertain for the tens of thousands of refugee students who have been educated on the Thailand-Burma border using curriculum that is not recognised by the Burma Government or most higher education institutions in the country and abroad. Despite the high quality of education on the border, refugee youth have real concerns about their potential for further education, employment opportunities and their future. These concerns are further magnified by continuously mounting pressures for refugees to return before they can do so voluntarily and with dignity.

“Whilst recent changes in Burma have led to further funding cuts along the border as well as refugee repatriation planning in the refugee camps, the ceasefires are fragile and there are still no political solutions to the decades old conflict. Furthermore, the non-recognition of refugee education represents another serious impediment to any meaningful definition of a voluntary return,” said Saw Htoo Htoo Stin, President of the Karen Student Network Group.

As urged by the youth in the documentary, educated refugee youth must have the opportunity to serve as active citizens and participate in Burma's transition. Until such time, and until a meaningful voluntary return of refugees and other displaced populations is possible, it is vital that the international community continues to support non-state education in the refugee camps and on the border.

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Burma Link is an information sharing organisation that advocates for the rights of Burma's ethnic nationalities and displaced conflict-affected communities.

Karen Student Network Group (KSNG) is an independent student group with over 12,000 members who mostly live in Karen refugee camps in Thailand. The KSNG's mission is to create better understanding among Karen student and youths for united political goals and objectives.

The Karen Youth Organisation (KYO) helps young Karen to develop their potential to work in and on behalf of the Karen community. The KYO provides training within the Karen community to ensure that local needs are met by local solutions.

The documentary is supported by the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network and Right to Play.