



Shan State
Refugee
Committee
(Thai Border)

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New report by the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) and Shan State Refugee Committee - Thai Border (SSRC-TB)

Shrinking refuge: new threats to refugee security on the Shan-Thai border

A new report by SHRF and SSRC-TB exposes how security threats from the Burma Army and United Wa State Army (UWSA) are heightening the vulnerability of over 6,000 displaced villagers in camps along the Shan State-Thai border, whose food support was cut by international donors over a year ago.

Despite an existing ceasefire with the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), the Burma Army has been reinforcing positions around the five Shan IDP camps, building new roads, sending out drones, and on February 2019 fired six 120 mm shells at two IDP locations. Terrified IDPs have been preparing bunkers and carrying out evacuation drills in preparation for further attack.

The UWSA has also been expanding its southern Shan State territories around the IDP camps. In February 2019 Wa troops seized hill fields near Loi Kaw Wan IDP camp in Mong Hsat township, in contravention of a boundary agreement with RCSS/SSA, depriving IDPs of already scarce agricultural land.

The extent of the growing militarization in southern Shan State is highlighted in new SHRF maps, showing hundreds of Burma Army and UWSA outposts thickly dotted around the Shan IDP camps.

Maps also show the extent to which the UWSA has solidified control over its southern territories, to which it forcibly resettled over 120,000 Wa villagers from the north twenty years ago, pushing out indigenous Shan, Akha and Lahu inhabitants – under a divide-and-rule strategy by the former Burmese military regime. Rural subsistence farming communities have been replaced by a sprawl of military garrisons overseeing large mono-crop plantations, mainly producing rubber for export to China.

While all eyes were on the UWSA's 30-year ceasefire celebration on the China border last month, a similar large parade of thousands of troops at their southern headquarters in Huay Aw, Mong Ton – only 10 kilometer from the Thai border -- was a stark reminder of the need to resolve territorial issues in southern Shan State before refugees can return.

“Our villages and lands are occupied by Burmese government and Wa troops. It is impossible for us to return home under the current conditions,” said Sai Leng, head of the Shan State Refugee Committee (Thai Border).

Yet appeals to Western donors to reverse their decision to end food aid to the Shan camps in October 2017 have so far gone unheeded. UN and INGO maps of humanitarian needs in southeast Burma now do not even show the Shan IDP camps.

“Ignoring the displaced Shan is not going to bring peace,” said Sai Leng. “We want international pressure on the Burma Army to end the war.”

Contact persons:

Sai Leng +66 (0) 86 188 9827 (Shan, Burmese, English)

Sai Yord Luin +66 (0) 97- 173-1530 (Shan, Burmese)

Charm Tong +66(0)876589551 (Shan, English, Thai)

Luen Horm +66(0) 880818868 (Shan, Thai)