



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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Stepping into Uncertainty: Refugee and IDP experiences of return in Southeast Myanmar

Today, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) launched its latest report, “Stepping into Uncertainty: Refugee and IDP experiences of return in Southeast Myanmar”. This report explores the issues faced by IDP and refugee returnees who returned to their original village, repatriation sites or other areas. If ethnic minorities are to assume an active and equal role in Myanmar’s future, then political, economic and social reintegration of returnees is critical.

KHRG interviews with returnees suggest that current support frameworks are so insufficient that those who do receive return assistance are generally no more capable of rebuilding their lives than those who have returned “spontaneously” with no institutional or governmental support whatsoever. Moreover, unmet promises about resettlement support and follow-up have left returnees vulnerable to further hardship and even future displacement if they are unable to adequately rebuild their lives in their new localities.

Although some accommodation has been made to assist with access to legal documents, many returnees continue to struggle to obtain the documents to which they are entitled as citizens. As such, full political, social and economic inclusion will also be hampered, as access to land, education, and employment require civil documentation. Lack of confidence in the peace process, distrust in government administration, and feelings of being discounted by the current government were also expressed by returnees and serve as clear indicators that the historical realities of conflict and violence are not yet (but in need of) being addressed as part of repatriation and reintegration initiatives.

KHRG’s program director, Naw Htoo Htoo, expressed her concern regarding the condition of refugee and IDP returnee. *“To assure the rights and future representation of ethnic minorities in Myanmar, the government and its stakeholders need to address the political and economic situation of resettled refugees and IDPs. The current lack of assistance has left returnees struggling to meet their basic needs, which prevents them from participating fully in political life and accessing their rights as citizens. Therefore, the Myanmar government, relevant ethnic armed groups and stakeholders need to provide greater support so that returnees can assume their role as citizens of Myanmar”.*

Through this report, KHRG hopes that national and international stakeholders will gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by refugee and IDP returnees in Southeast Myanmar. Through a comprehensive set of recommendations, it calls on the responsible governments and organizations to take actions to ensure that the shortcomings with repatriation and reintegration process are addressed.

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