

October 31, 2017

Media release from the Shan State Refugee Committee (Thai Border) on U Zaw Htay's offer of aid to displaced Shan

U Zaw Htay, Director General of the State Counsellor's Office, has recently been quoted in the media saying that the government's National Reconciliation and Peace Centre plans to assist displaced Shan whose food supplies were cut by international NGOs, if requested.

SSRC (TB) has not been contacted directly by the Burmese government on this issue, and has doubts about the sincerity of the offer, which appears to be a publicity stunt to divert attention from the Burma Army's ongoing military operations systematically depopulating Burma's ethnic states.

Most of the displaced Shan fled the Burma Army's massive 1996-1998 scorched earth program in central Shan State, which drove over 300,000 people from their homes. Hundreds of villagers were tortured, killed, and raped. The majority of the 1,400 villages forcibly displaced twenty years ago remain abandoned to this day, the lands seized and occupied by Burma Army troops.

Today the same horror is unfolding in northern Rakhine State, while large-scale militarization and offensives are continuing in Kachin and Shan States. The fact that the Burma Army is continuing its systematic brutality against the ethnic peoples, with ongoing impunity, is what is preventing the displaced communities on the Shan-Thai border from returning home.

The Burmese government's offer to assist the displaced Shan, while keeping silent on the Burma Army's ongoing systematic crimes, thus rings hollow indeed.

"What we want from the Burmese government is a political resolution to the conflict, which will lead to a withdrawal of Burma Army troops from our homelands and an end to military abuses," said SSRC (TB) Chair Loong Sai Lieng from Goong Jor refugee camp. "Unless this takes place, it is impossible for us to return home."

The SSRC (TB) reiterates our urgent appeal to the international community to resume aid directly to the Shan IDPs and refugees until they can return home voluntarily and in safety and dignity.

In October 2017, food aid to over 6,000 people in all the IDP and refugee camps on the Shan-Thai border was cut off by international donors.

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See also Shan State Refugee Committee (Thai Border) Urgent Appeal and Shan Human Rights Foundation Update on Shan refugee situation August 30, 2017 at <http://bit.ly/2zZUpRE>