

Board of General Ministries  
Work of the Burma Refugee Commission  
2019

**January 7-17, 2019** In January, 10 representatives from all of the American Baptist Churches entities visited Malaysia and Myanmar for a discovery and advocacy trip to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Myanmar. Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, Rev. Masha Scipio, Rev. Dr. Robin Stoops, Rev. Joan Friesen, Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri, Rev. Dr. Doug Avilesbernal, Rev. Dr. Ann Borquist, Rev. Jeni Pedzinski, Rev. Florence Li, and Rev. Leslie Turley were on this trip.

**January 4-9, 2019** – Rev. Dr. Roy Medley visited the regional office of the United Nations High Command for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bangkok to advocate for the Internally Displaced People (IDP) in the Kachin and Karen States as well as in the Thailand border camps. learn more about their understandings of the situation in the Kachin State. After this visit, Rev. Dr. Medley visited the Kachin State and met with key leaders there.

**February 12, 2019** – Chin Community leaders and commission members visited Ambassador Samuel Brownback, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom at the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

**March 4, 2019** Visit to the UNHCR Regional office in Bangkok by Rev. Dr. Hkalam Samson, Rev. Dr. Maw San, Rev. Dr. Thlaawr Bahlhrin, Rev. Leslie Turley. We met with representatives to discuss the UNHCR to require individual review of status for protection of the Chin population. as well as the current situation with the Kachin in the Kachin State.

**March 27, 2019** The commission received a letter from the regional UNHCR office in Bangkok to explain the discontinuation of the individual review of status. (see attachment 1)

**June 17, 2019** Meeting in DC with Gum San Nsang of the Kachin Alliance – Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, Rev. Florence Li, Rev. Leslie Turley with Tina Mufford, US Government Commission on International Religious Freedom to for advocacy with the Kachin.

**July, 2019** trip to Kuala Lumpur (KL), Malaysia with Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, Zasang Cinzah. This trip was to visit Chin, Karen and Kachin refugee communities in KL as well as meet with representatives of UNHCR Malaysia. (see attachment 2)

**August 1, 2019** Travel to Washington DC with Zo Tum Hmung, Zasang Cinzah, Rev. Dr. Stephen Hre Klo, Rev. Dr. Thlaar Bahlhrin, Rev. Sui Hliang Chorel, Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, Rev. Leslie Turley with the following officials to discuss the ceiling limit to be set by the US congress and the US president for immigrants and refugees:

Richard Albright, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (PRM)  
Larry Bartlett, Director of Admissions

Ambassador Brownback, Religious Freedom – While meeting with Ambassador Brownback, we also discussed strategy for protection of Rev. Dr. Samson after his remarks at the International Religious Freedom Conference in Washington, DC and the lodging of a criminal complaint against him by the Myanmar military.

**August 12, 2019** Meeting at ABC - Representatives of American Baptist Churches, the Office of the General Secretary, the Home Mission Societies, International Ministries and representatives of the Myanmar diaspora met with Dr. Samson to discuss strategy for protection of Dr. Samson as he returns to Myanmar.

**Advocacy for Dr. Samson** – Letters from the Office of the General Secretary, Home Mission Societies, Baptist World Alliance and International ministries were written to Vice President Pence, the UNHCR, US State Department, Secretary of State Pompeo, and the National Council of Churches in support of Dr. Samson. The official Letter from American Baptist Churches Rev. Dr. Lee Spitzer is attached. (See Attachment 3)

**September 9, 2019** Outcome announcement of the case dropped by the Burmese military against Dr. Samson. (See attachment 4)

## Attachment 1

On March 14, 2019, UNHCR announced the discontinuation of the individual review of status for Chin refugees globally. The organization is very grateful for the candid and constructive dialogue with Chin refugees and their advocates while the individual review process was underway. In that spirit of cooperation and dialogue, I write in order to provide more detail on the recent decision and its implications.

The organization's commitment from the beginning of the individual review exercise was to continuously monitor developments in Chin State and to adapt our position if circumstances warranted it. UNHCR has been carefully monitoring developments in and around Chin State since the individual review process was announced mid-last year. We have examined reports, assessments, and media accounts in the public domain, consulted advocates, and met with individuals and organizations in Chin State. Additionally, we have cooperated closely in an updating of country of origin information by an independent entity, whose report has just been made public.

Through these efforts and with the deterioration of the security environment in Chin State and the Sagaing Region since the beginning of 2019, we have concluded that the individual review of protection needs for Chin refugees is no longer warranted.

Pending the termination of individual review procedures, UNHCR offices delayed issuance of any final decisions on status. As a result, no Chin refugee lost refugee status during this process. Access to protection, assistance, and other services was maintained throughout the period of the individual review.

With the discontinuation of the individual review process, Chin refugees will maintain their refugee status until a durable solution has been identified. This does not preclude individual Chin refugees seeking voluntarily to return to Myanmar if they wish to do so. UNHCR will support such efforts in line with the voluntary repatriation package outlined in counselling during the individual review, including support for the reacquisition of identity and travel documents.

Chin refugees already identified and being processed for third country resettlement will continue to be eligible for this solution. New referrals for resettlement will take place only in individual cases, in line with UNHCR's global criteria and regional priorities and on par with other refugee groups.

UNHCR will also continue to advocate for Chin refugees to achieve a legal and protected status in the countries of asylum and for the right to work. Where feasible, and if refugees voluntarily opt for a change in status, UNHCR will support efforts to transition from refugee to legal migrant status.

UNHCR offices in states hosting Chin refugees have begun informing the affected refugee and asylum-seeker communities, governments, service providers and other partners about the discontinuation of the individual review process and of the continued need for international protection for recognized Chin refugees beyond 31 December 2019. UNHCR will reach out to communities with further information and urge communities in turn to reach out to us for the same.

We are very appreciative of your advocacy on behalf of the Chin community and hope that UNHCR may be able to continue to rely on your engagement as we move forward towards solutions for this population of concern.

With best wishes,

## Attachment 1

Emily

Emily Bojovic  
Senior Regional Durable Solutions Officer  
UNHCR Regional Office for Southeast Asia

***Every year, refugees walk over 2 billion km to safety.  
Please join our solidarity movement to honour their resilience:  
[www.stepwithrefugees.org](http://www.stepwithrefugees.org)***

## **Refugees Communities from Myanmar, In Malaysia**

### **Representatives from USA**

- Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, General Secretary Emeritus, American Baptist Churches, USA
- Rev. Leslie Turley, Area Director, Southeast Asia and Japan, International Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA
- Zasang Cinzah, Advocacy Volunteer, of CIAN, USA.

### **Introduction**

We, the representatives from the Chin Integration and Advocacy Network USA and the American Baptist Churches visited several Chin refugees' communities and other Burmese Ethnic Refugees communities in Malaysia from July 19<sup>th</sup> to July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019. We observed the current situation of refugees. Since the Malaysian government does not welcome refugee, the refugee who live in Malaysia are facing a lot of difficulty in term of security, healthcare, employment, education and protection.

We also met UNHCR Malaysia representatives on the July 22<sup>nd</sup> for discussion the concern of the Refugee in Malaysia in term of refugee rights, safety, security and livelihood of refugee communities in Malaysia.

### **On July 19<sup>th</sup> Community visits**

- **We visited Arakan Refugee Committee (ARRC) from 9:30 am to 11 am.**
  1. The General Secretary of ARRC, Aung Myo Thu gave us the presentation about the brief History of Arakan, the current situation of Arakan in Burma, and the situation of Arakan Refugee in Malaysia during the visit.
  2. Mr. Aung Myo Thu explained that there are still more and more casualties in the Arakan state and more than 50,000 of IDPs now in the very bad condition in several shelters.
  3. Mr. Thu mentioned that the Government led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi denied access aids to IDPs camp from Arakan Social Organization from foreign countries.
  4. The People of Arakanise suffered from Burmese Military due to suspect of supporting arm group.
  5. The Arakan Refugee in Malaysia ah facing difficulties in their daily life such as arrest, health care, education and employment. The UNHCR Malaysia closed door for Arakan Refugee for applying Refugee Status under the UNHCR Protection.
  6. According to ARRC, Malaysia, there are active members Arakan refugees currently living in Malaysia and among 25000, only less than 3000 got UNHCR registration as asylum seeker.

➤ **We visited Independent Chin Communities (ICC) from 11:15- 12:30 PM**

1. The representative of ICC, Mr. James B.T.B had presentation of the current situation Chin Refugee in Malaysia. James from ICC said that estimated around 41,000 thousand of Chin Refugee are living in Malaysia in fear of arrest of Malaysia police and facing discrimination from local residents. Among 41000 thousand, 30,000 thousand are undocumented, and around 6000 thousand are registered as asylum seekers, and only less than 5000 are under the protection of UNHCR.
2. James mentioned that there more new refugee arrival from Chin State, Myanmar to Malaysia to seek UNHCR protection especially from the conflict zone- Paletwah Township each week. Some former Refugee whose were forced to return by UNHCR were also return to Malaysia due to lack of human rights and safety concern in Myanmar.
3. We observed that three Chin refugees who fled to Malaysia on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019 died on the spot of car crushed on Thailand and Malaysia border, and another passenger of seven of Chin refugees were critical condition due to badly injury, and that seven survivors were arrested by Malaysia Immigration.
4. We also observed that ICC demand UNHCR Malaysia to register Chin Refugee in Malaysia for their security reason such as especially avoiding arrested by Malaysia Immigration.

➤ **We visited Chin Refugee Committee ( CRC) from 1:00 am to 3 pm**

1. We met Chin Refugee Committee members at CRC office. We learned that CRC has been taken initiative Australia Private sponsorship application process, and around 800 refugees were immigrated to Australia since the program is opened to Chin Refugees.
2. We observed that CRC provides service to Chin Refugees who are registered with their office as CRC member around 14,000 thousand mainly undocumented.
3. We learned that Malaysia Immigration heavily cracked down illegal workers and mainly refugees are arrested and facing detaining and deportation.
4. We observed refugees are facing difficulty to obtain employment due to Government restriction on labor law and crack down illegal workers. Many local
5. We observed that some Chin refugee, who are denied to register UNHCR as asylum seeker and who were terminated their UNHCR protection during cessation period are facing unable to afford healthcare treatment in Malaysia due to over expensive.

➤ **We visited Karen Refugee Committee ( KRC) from 4 pm to 5 PM**

1. Karen Refugee Committee representative Marilyn Nu explained that many Karen Refugee in Malaysia faced unfair treatment from UNHCR Malaysia due to misunderstood the situation of refugee individual problem.
2. We learned that there are around 15 000 thousand Karen refugee stay in Malaysia, and around 2500 are active member with Karen Refugee Committee. Only a few hundred are under UNHCR protection. Since the UNHCR Malaysia stop registration

for Karen refugee in 2013, thousand of Karen refugees are facing many difficulties in Malaysia including arrested, imprisonment, and deportation.

3. We observed that around 40-50 Refugees still arrived in Kuala Lumpur each month from Karen region due to ongoing armed conflict, and many civilians escaped from the country, and come to seek UNHCR protection in Malaysia.
4. Karen Refugee Committee seriously concerns the livelihood of Karen refugee in Malaysia and children education.
5. The refugees are not safe among local Malaysia and due to restriction of Malaysia Labor Law, many refugee are difficult to obtain employment.
6. Marilyn Nu from KRC explained that the UNHCR Malaysia should consider new registration for Karen refugee in Malaysia for gaining better security and safety reasons.

### On July 20<sup>th</sup> Community Visits and Prison Visit

- We visited Penjara Wanita Kajang, Prison from 9:30 am to 11pm for meeting two refugees' prisoners from Myanmar.
  - Representatives from ABC, USA and CIANUSA visited Penjara Wanita Kajang Prison on July 20<sup>th</sup> morning. We were allowed to meet only two persons from that prison.
1. We met Lal Rin Thlai: DOB: 06/26/1995 from Chin Refugee in Malaysia. She was arrested on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 at her workplace, Guiling Restaurant near Pudu Plaza Hotel. She speaks a little Chinese. She told us that she had no enough food in Prison. Also, told us that she work as cook assistant and cleaning helper and earn only 50 cent Ringgit per day. "There is a lot of mosquito and never get enough sleep" she said as her tear dropping on her face. She told us that she was already appearing at the Court and sentenced her to be in prison for at least four month. And the the court order her to purchased her own air ticket for deportation cost. After for month, she will be transferred to detention camp she is not able to have her own return ticket.

Her father is Hrang Ci and Her Mother is Van Thian Nei from Kawl Fang village in Chin State, Myanmar. She has four brother and two sisters. She came to Malaysia due to fear of Burmese Military persecution in February, 2014. After arrived in Malaysia, the Malaysia police had been arrested twice because she does not have any documents. But she managed to avoid imprisonment by giving RM 1000 each time to the police.

2. We met another person name Reirili, other name Gospel. Due to language difficulty, we cannot communicate with her. We can see only how depressed she is. However, we learned a little about her from the community. She came to Malaysia recently with her son from the conflict zone- Paletwah. Her husband and two of her children are still in fear at Paletwah region. Two month ago she was arrested by Malaysia immigration. She will be deported back to Myanmar after serving four months presentment, the community is able to provide her return air ticket to the immigration.

➤ **We visited Coalition of Burma Ethnic, Malaysia (COBEM) from 2:30 to 4 pm**

1. We met a member of COBEM team from each organization representative. The Representatives are Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Mon ethnic in Malaysia.
2. Each community representative has brought common issues such as new registration at UNHCR Malaysia, healthcare problem, lack of refugee rights and security concern for refugee personal in Malaysia.
3. Since we were unable to visit Kachin Refugee community and Mon Refugee Community, we gave more time on Kachin and Mon representatives to hear more stories from them. –
4. Mon refugees in Malaysia are scattering in Kuala Lumpur suburb. The representative estimates that there are around 3000 Mon refugee in Kuala Lumpur who seek protection from UNHCR Malaysia but just a few of them were registered under UNHCR Protection. Since 2013, the UNHCR Malaysia stopped registered Mon refugee in Malaysia.

➤ **We met group of Refugees situated in Pudu area at Zophei Christian Fellowship from 8 pm to 10 pm**

1. We observed that Mr. Tawh Hmun Lian, UNHCR Number 791-09C06673/ RSC case number (s) MY-212659/ A-file number (s) 212723440 stood up and said that their family has been approved by USCIS on August 19, 2014, done Medical exam and also finished pre departure Orientation Class. However, since then OPE or IOM never contact them for departure to US. After a long period of time, they inquired to OPE office, and the OPE officer told them that their file had been cancelled due to unable to contact them for departure. However, they have not received any notification letter for cancellation from OPE or any office. He believed that his file has been held in the office of Overseas Processing Entity (OPE). He asked “can you help me find out why?”
2. One representative from Zophei Christian Fellowship said that local residents of Malaysian rob a lot of their members on the street. Some local resident are gang with female and male together. These incidents have been happened almost every day. He said that they are not safe from local people as well from the Malaysia polices.
3. We observed that the refugees are huge concerns the Malaysia immigration crack down on illegal workers. They live in fear with arrest by Immigration anytime. They could not obtain employment from local shop, restaurant or retailers store. Since the new government of Malaysia has restriction unlawful work, many local shop owners are afraid to give jobs to the refugee.



## Only July 21<sup>st</sup> Community Visits

1. We met group of Refugee who fled from the conflict zone- Paletwah Township in Chin State from 6pm to 8pm. We observed that the refugee who fled from Paletwah experienced double jeopardy. The Burmese accused them being support AA militant group. In other side, AA Militant group has been forced to join their group any men they find in the village. For that reason a lot of men are fled to their village to seek safe places anywhere they can.
2. We also observed that some refugee were experienced burn their home and village. Some refugees had been separate from their family.
3. The Representative from Mara Community Committee (MCC) said that there are many people from their region are now staying in IDP camp due to the conflict between Burmese Military and AA Militant.



## AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

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*Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer  
General Secretary*

### **ABCUSA General Secretary Urges Prayers on September 8, 2019 for Kachin Baptist Leader and Members**

September 4, 2019

Dear American Baptists,

On behalf of the ABCUSA Burma Refugee Commission, I am writing to all our American Baptist churches, ministries and leaders, to share our deep concern for the safety and wellbeing of the Rev. Dr. Hkalam Samson, president of the Kachin Baptist Convention of Myanmar. Dr. Samson has been summoned to appear in court on September 9, 2019 regarding a lawsuit instigated by Lt. Col. Than Htike of the Northern Command of Myanmar's military. Kachin Baptists have been subject to attack for many years.

The lawsuit appears to be in response to the appearance of Dr. Samson at the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom hosted by US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. Dr. Samson was one of those present during President Trump's press conference highlighting those who have endured religious persecution.

Accordingly, I am asking *all American Baptist churches to include a special time of prayer during your worship services on Sunday, September 8*, to intercede for Dr. Samson and our Kachin sisters and brothers.

In the book of Acts, when Peter and John were detained and threatened by authorities in Jerusalem, the church received their news and "raised their voices together in prayer to God." In part, here's what they prayed: "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:24; 29-30).

Now, it is our turn – indeed, our responsibility – to pray with faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit!

[See <https://www.abc-usa.org/2019/08/burma-refugee-commission-releases-declaration-of-concern-for-safety-of-president-of-the-kachin-baptist-convention-of-myanmar/>]

Dr. Hkalam Samson, as former General Secretary and currently President of the Kachin Baptist Convention, has exercised his pastoral concern as the shepherd of his flock in speaking out against unjust policies, which have led to over 100,000 Kachins being driven from their homes by military conflict, forcing them to become Internally Displaced Persons. Dr. Samson is one of the few religious leaders in Burma, Christian or otherwise, to publicly advocate tolerance and equitable justice for all religions within Myanmar.

The Burma Refugee Commission and I are urging that the charges be dropped against Dr. Samson through communication with US government diplomats, United Nations officials, and Myanmar civilian government representatives. Further, we are requesting that the civilian

government leaders of Myanmar and the military support the democratic rights of Dr. Samson, Kachin Baptists, and all citizens of Myanmar, which includes the fundamental right of peaceful free speech within Myanmar.

If the military insists on pursuing these charges against Dr. Samson or harming another Kachin Baptist leader, Rev. Gam Seng (who we understand has been threatened should he return to his home village), Myanmar will continue to be a pariah among the nations who cherish freedom, democracy and basic human rights.

Sincerely,



Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer  
General Secretary, American Baptist Churches USA

#### Attachment 4

Everyone's love and support and also was deeply felt by Rev Samson and our community. This was truly a work of miracle-like turning water into wine-for He's always been in our midst. This is the first in modern day Burmese history that the army backdown form a lawsuit.

Everyone from Laiza, Myitkyina, Geneva, New York, and the White Houses's help came in synchronized like a clockwork. Praise be to the Lord.

Today, as soon as Rev. Samson's case was dropped, Burmese military CiC filed charges against Ven. Sandita, renowned monk who spoke out against Buddhist religious extremism. He was also at the IRF, last month.

Please keep him in our prayer. He also assisted in Rev Samson's case to Aung San Suu Kyi.

In Christ,

Nsang Gum San  
President, Kachin Alliance