



BURMA ADVOCACY GROUP

Press Release

January 24, 2025

The Burma Advocacy Group, consisting of Burma Diaspora Churches, Community Groups, and Advocates, joins with Church World Service, the Refugee Council USA and others in expressing our profound concern for the recent steps the Trump Administration is taking to curtail all immigration and refugee resettlement in the United States. The sweeping Presidential Executive Actions will affect thousands of displaced Burma nationals who have fled to Thailand, Malaysia and India to escape the ruthless bombings and attacks against them by the military junta which violently overthrew free and fair elections on February 1, 2021.

We remind our President and elected officials that our immigration and refugee policies have human consequences. During the Burma Advocacy Group's most recent visits with displaced Burma nationals in Malaysia and the border camps in Thailand we heard consistent testimony that suicides had increased, especially among young people, during the previous shutdown of the US Refugee Admissions Program. The new presidential actions will again put at risk for suicide persons who have looked to America for hope in the midst of military oppression and religious persecution and who will once again find our doors shut.

These executive orders tragically ignore the solid contributions immigrants and refugees from Burma and elsewhere have made to our country, including our current First Lady. In city after city, town after town, refugee students from Burma are excelling in academics and being accepted into our top and ivy league universities including Harvard, Yale, and Stanford. Burma adult refugees have created new businesses across our country and have provided a trustworthy workforce in the communities where they live. They bring with them core religious values rooted in their Christian, Buddhist and Muslim faiths that strengthen our moral fiber as a nation. They are patriots, entering into government services and our military.

Burma nationals who have fled to Thailand, Malaysia, and India are subjected to a thorough vetting by US Homeland Security before they are approved for resettlement and must fit within the number of refugees to be resettled as set by the President. They undergo US provided cultural orientation to prepare them for life in the United States. Churches, which have always been in the forefront of resettlement efforts, and family members previously resettled in the US are ready to welcome and to help establish those who have been waiting. This is not unlike President Trump's own family who resettled his wife's parents through the US policy of family reunification of immigrants and refugees.

Burmese American Community Institute/Burmese Christian Association of N. America/Chin Association of Maryland/Chin Baptist Association of North America/Chin Baptist Churches USA/Chin Community of Indiana/Chin National Unity Organization/Grassroots Movement for Burma/Kachin Baptist Churches USA/Kachin Alliance USA/Kachin American Baptist Association/Karen Baptist Churches USA/Karen Organization of America/Karenni Baptist Convention of America/Milwaukee Burmese Christian Church/US Campaign for Burma/US Chin Coalition/Zo Chin Ministers Union of USA (ZOMU)/American Baptist Churches, Office of General Secretary/American Baptist Churches, International Ministries/American Baptist Home Mission Societies /American Baptist Churches of Nebraska/Baptist World Alliance/21Wilberforce

Just two years ago, a light of hope shone again in Thailand when the Thai government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the US Government agreed to again resettle Burma nationals – Rohingya, Christian, Buddhist and other, who have been in the camps there. The Burma Advocacy Group was there to witness the thorough efforts of all three bodies to vet those eligible for resettlement. We also learned positively that suicide rates had diminished almost immediately upon the enactment of the new agreement. Now that light of hope has been extinguished, we fear the consequences.

Families who have bought tickets for their resettlement flights, awoke on January 22, to the news that all flights had been cancelled and no new arrangements were to be made. This is blow to those on the cusp of long-awaited resettlement who had been thoroughly vetted and approved for entry..

The 90 day suspension of all aid to displaced persons overseas will create extreme hardship on Burma nationals and other displaced persons. Rice distribution per person in the camps of Thailand has been steadily decreasing. Rice is the dietary staple, and the level of distribution has already been bordering at a crisis level. This 90 day suspension will create tremendous human suffering among those affected.

In addition, the order, Securing Our Borders, also aims to terminate Temporary Protected Status — a program which grants legal status to migrants for a limited term as a result of the humanitarian crises in some countries, which have been marked by political instability, economic collapse, widespread violence, and lack of access to basic necessities such as food, medicine and health care. This Presidential action affects many in the Burma diaspora in the US and has a disproportionate impact on members of the Civil Disobedience Movement who bravely and heroically protested and acted to subvert the military regime’s overthrow of their budding democracy. The Burma Act passed by Congress specifically singles out this group for assistance and protection by the US Government. Others impacted include duly-elected officials and parliamentarians who have sacrificially struggled for democracy in Burma and are forced to flee.

Not only do these Presidential Executive Actions lead to despair within Malaysia, India, and the camps in Thailand, it also leads to despair among the Burma nationals here in this country whose hope has been to be reunited with family members in the promise of freedom and security that America offers.

The destruction of the Francis Scott Key bridge is a cautionary tale. It took only minutes for it to be destroyed; it will take years for it to be rebuilt. The long-term costs of these Executive Orders will impact our country’s future capacity to respond to the urgent plight of refugees. We have seen in the past four years, how difficult it is to rebuild the components for the regulated, compassionate, and carefully vetted resettlement of those who have fled persecution and war waged against them by despotic anti-democratic forces that are guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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