



**From 'vulnerable' to 'valuable':  
Burmese Diaspora and Forced Migrants as Distant  
Peaceworkers**

A Research Paper presented by:

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(United States of America)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Human Rights, Gender and Conflict Studies: Social Justice  
Perspective**

(SJP)

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The Hague, The Netherlands  
December 2013

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## List of Acronyms

ALTSEAN	Alternative ASEAN Network (on Burma)
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCSDPT	Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand
IDP	Internally Displaced People
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBC	(United Nations) Peacebuilding Commission
RTG	Royal Thai Government
TB(B)C	The Border Consortium/Thailand-Burma Border Consortium
UN	United Nations
UNAC	United Nations Association in Canada
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

## **Abstract**

Instead of the usual top-down approach of the hegemonic peace-building paradigm, this research paper employs the bottom-up approach. This is done in order to analyze the role of the forced migrants in peacebuilding process.

The internal conflict in Burma during the past decades has created a wave of displaced people, many of who became forced migrants into neighboring countries. Thailand, in particular, is home to a large portion of these forced migrants, in both camps and urban settings. Such migrants, moreover, are oftentimes vilified and/or victimized.

As the forced migrant population lives in exile, the hegemonic peace-building schemes often fail to acknowledge their role in the peace processes in their home country. With limited financial and civic resources, these migrants often face the hardship of daily living. This struggle then becomes their foremost priority. Consequently, their transnational participation in peace processes is often neglected. However, peace processes, at their root, aim to create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and a stabilization of society by reintegrating the affected parties into civilian life.

With this in mind, this qualitative research examines the capacity of the Burmese forced migrants in Thailand. Emphasis is placed on the transnational role and the influence of the migrants' collective agency in peace-building processes. The paper examines two more points: what kinds of opportunities are currently available to support migrants' peace-building initiatives at home; and, what kinds of challenges are present to deter their possible contribution to peace-building in their home country.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

The causes of refugee migration (inter- and intra-state conflict, state failure, and the inequalities of the international political economy) are often related to the state of development of a country. Furthermore, the consequences of forced migration have been associated with security, the spread of conflict, terrorism, and transnationalism. Because forced migrants are in a situation in which the government of their origin is unable or unwilling to guarantee their physical safety, including an inability to protect their fundamental human rights, they are forced to seek protection from the international community. Ensuring that refugees receive safety and access to their rights, livelihoods, and the possibility to be reintegrated into their country of origin or another state is therefore an important human rights issue that is linked to the state of development.

## **Keywords**

Refugees, Forced Migrants, peacebuilding, transnationalism, diaspora, Burma/Myanmar.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

### *Background*

Burmese forced migrants have been fleeing to neighboring countries for the past several decades to escape from the long-lasting conflict in their home country. Sharing a long and historically porous border with Burma, Thailand has been a popular for such migrants. The recent years were marked by relative cessation of conflict in Burma. In the first few years after a major conflict ends, a crucial window of opportunity is present to get early peacebuilding efforts underway, yet the international community often misses it. This is not to say peacebuilding is limited to that early period, only that this early period is crucial for the success of any peacebuilding effort.

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of bottom-up approach to peacebuilding, through the experiences of Burmese forced migrants and their role in peace processes. Specific focus will be placed on politically active Burmese refugees in Thailand. The paper will also raise relevant questions for other practitioners working in peacebuilding.

### *Rationale*

Building peace in countries devastated by conflict is a complex task. Peacebuilding is a term describing activities and outside interventions that are designed “to establish the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations” in order to avoid the launch or relapse of a violent conflict within a nation (UNAC n.d.). To achieve the ultimate objective of peace-building efforts, reconciliation amongst all quarrelling parties to help a country move from war to sustainable peace, the peace initiatives need to take a holistic approach in targeting the underlying causes or potential causes of violence, where political, socioeconomic, security and development aspects are addressed coherently. Peace processes at their crux, therefore, aim to create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilize society; and, these activities include, but are not limited to, reintegrating former combatants into civilian society, reforming security sector, strengthening the rule of law, improving respect and eradicating the culture of impunity for human rights, promoting peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation techniques (UNAC n.d.), delineating the need for cooperation amongst diverse players.

The term ‘peace-building’ was first coined over 30 years ago by the renowned Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung, who advocated creation of peace-building structures to promote sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict and supporting local capacity for peace management and conflict resolution (1976). Galtung's perspective emphasized a bottom-up approach that decentralized social and economic structures, shifting societal systems from structures of coercion and violence to a culture of peace (ibid). John Paul Lederach, on the other hand, pioneered a different concept of peace-building as engaging grassroots, local, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international and other actors to create a sustainable peace process. Lederach, however, deviated from advocating the same degree of structural change as proposed by Galtung (1997).

The current peacebuilding discourse situates refugees as a matter of secondary concern, focusing instead on programmes in the country of origin to reconcile and prevent reigniting another conflict. Refugees' position in the discourse of "normality" and "order" is distinguished only by virtue of their being anomalies from the normal identities and ordered spaces of the sovereign state, a relation that Agamben (as cited in Nyers, 2006: xiii) describes as an "extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion" (Nyers 2006:xiii) The relationship between peacebuilding and refugees is therefore viewed as unidirectional, top-down, with the return of refugees marking a pinnacle of successful peacebuilding (Milner 2008:16). In the hegemonic paradigm, therefore, refugees are assigned a speechless, invisible, and passive role that is the opposite of the "normal" sovereign identity of citizenship (Nyers 2006:xiv).

This paper challenges the dominant depiction of refugees as vulnerable, passive entities in international politics and explores the topic of collaboration between diaspora/forced migrants and governmental and non-governmental actors in peace processes. To grasp the impact of refugees on any given conflict situation, it requires analysing the capabilities of the refugees, as well as the broader political opportunity structures within the country of origin and the host country that might affect mobilization and engagement of diaspora groups (Pirkkalainen and Abdile, as cited in Spear 2006:3). It seeks to contribute to a small but proliferating body of critical literature that has moved away from the problem-solving approach and is exploring the complex challenges and opportunities that refugees pose to the peacebuilding. The goal is to identify opportunities for key policy recommendations for external parties wishing to establish working relationships with forced migrants. The paper therefore mainly targets an audience of policy makers, however the considerations in the pages that follow will be of interest also to other practitioners in the development field as well as to diaspora groups themselves. The research ultimately hopes to add to sustainable political and donor interest, providing a unique opportunity for engaging the full spectrum of stakeholders required to formulate and to implement a comprehensive solution for self-sustaining, durable peace and resolve the related displaced population issues. The paper presents findings from data collected during the fieldwork in Thailand during May to August 2013, as well as from secondary data, analysing how various stakeholders and diaspora groups collaborate in peace processes in the context of Burmese forced migrants in Thailand.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

*"Peacebuilding involves a great number and variety of stakeholders – starting with the citizens of the countries themselves where peacebuilding is underway. It is neither a purely political, security nor developmental process, but one that must bring together security, political, economic, social and human rights elements in a coherent and integrated way." Judy Cheng-Hopkins, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation, 2010.*

Peacebuilding is a collective endeavor that needs to be undertaken by a myriad of stakeholders. There are many peacebuilding operations involving policies based on donors and multilateral governing bodies' ideas. These actors serve as the primary agents of peace-building work in the world today. However, I will be focusing on the role of the target beneficiaries, the "forced migrant" and diaspora population in the peace processes.

### 1.3 Research Objective

While there are dozens of studies done on Burmese forced migrants (Aung-Thwin 2002; Bowles 1998; Checchi 2003; Lopes Cardozo et al 2004), currently, the main focus often emphasizes the vulnerability of these migrants, “[...] call for broader under-studied Burmese overseas communities, beyond the emotional focus [...]” (Egreteau 2012:117). The studies portray them as mere “victims” of the internal conflict. Subsequently, a large focus is placed on their hardship in daily living. These studies, moreover, argue that migrants’ security is subject to the top-down approach of international governing bodies.

While not disregarding the difficult predicaments of forced migrants and diaspora in Thailand (many of these forced migrants are faced with dire challenges of livelihood and security, so their political activism and agency are largely ignored), my research is aimed at seeing and understanding how the collective agency of politically active forced migrants makes them fully capable agents in peace-building processes. Indeed, the role of refugees and diaspora organizations is presently not sufficiently taken into account by the international actors that are trying to influence peace-building process in Burma. Furthermore, I will examine the means by which they may contribute to peace-building process, and what tools and platforms are available for their political participation.

My research paper aims to:

1. redefine the concept of peacebuilders and analyze the existing discourse of peace-building paradigm; and
2. explore how the forced migrants may contribute to the peace processes

On the whole, I’m interested in probing what role the forced migrants may play in the peace processes. The research will examine the current peace building paradigm and its application to see whether it presents a platform to reflect the activism and the agency of the forced migrant diaspora population.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The main question:

- What kind of role do forced migrants play in establishing peace?

Sub-questions:

1. How are the roles of the forced migrants conceptualized in the dominant paradigm?
2. How is the concept reflected in the actual fieldwork, in specific, through Burmese forced migrant communities in Thailand?
3. What strategies do NGOs and the politically active Burmese forced migrants implement, and what kind of tools are available for them?

## 1.5 Methodology

This research utilizes a combination of two main methodological strategies: secondary data analysis method; and, qualitative interviewing method in a case study setting. Although both quantitative and qualitative analysis will be conducted to present a narrative description in line with the objective of the research, the main focus of the research relies on qualitative data to explore the role of different stakeholders in peace-building.

Bangkok, Thailand, rather than refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, was chosen specifically as the site for the research for a couple of reasons. As the majority of the information available on the Burmese forced migrants focuses on those residing in the camps (Checchi et al. 2003; Lopes Cardozo et al. 2004; Aung-Thwin 2002; Bowles 1998), I wanted to focus on forced migrants living in urban settings, outside the refugee camps. Bangkok, a cosmopolitan city that is increasingly attracting more and more migrants, is a popular destination for the Burmese forced migrants who are seeking for different livelihood and life options. Furthermore, many (international) NGOs and consultants that work with the forced migrants are stationed in Bangkok, as the strategic location facilitates the ease of communication on the national, regional, and international scale for advocacy purposes.

The collection of primary data mainly centered around the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma)'s 'No Peace Without You' campaign, which was chosen because of its direct relevance to the objective of this qualitative study of an inclusive approach to peace processes:

*"The Burmese government and international community should listen to the voices of all people affected by conflict in our country. This includes migrant workers because they are also victims of the conflict, many of them fled from civil war in ethnic areas and from forced conscription." Mu Gloria (ALTSEAN-Burma, 2012)*

The campaign was aimed to call for Burmese migrant workers to have the right to have a participatory role in Burma's peace processes (ALTSEAN-Burma, 2012).

I engaged with journals, articles, and websites, especially political groups on social media<sup>1</sup> to formulate an idea of the public information around the Burmese peace processes. I also attended a number of relevant seminars and meetings<sup>2</sup> in Bangkok, Thailand to learn about the latest findings as well as to network with the relevant personnel in the field to discuss the state of current affairs and their implications.

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<sup>1</sup> [Rohingya Community](#); [RHC Thailand](#); [Thai Voice For Refugees](#); [Rohingya Vision](#); [Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network](#); [Rohingya Blogger](#); [Burma \(Myanmar\) Muslim Massacre](#); [Rohingya Muslim Organization, Arakan, Burma](#).

<sup>2</sup> 'Violence in the name of Buddhism | Myanmar's Spreading Sectarian Violence,' Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, Bangkok, Thailand, 9 May 2013; 'Burmese Light' Book Launch & Signing event, Bangkok, Thailand, 6 August 2013; 'Rethinking Refugees: Protection, Survival and Prospects for Displaced Persons from Burma,' ICIRD 2013, Bangkok, Thailand, 22 August 2013.

Questions	Mapped Sources of Data	Methods of Data Collection
How are the roles of the forced migrants conceptualized in the dominant paradigm?	Discourse/Policies	Official statements of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Peacebuilding Commission, international policies of Thailand and Burma.
How is the concept translated in the actual fieldwork, in specific, through Burmese forced migrant communities in Thailand?	Burmese forced migrants and diaspora	Semi-structured Interviews/Group Interviews/documents from NGOs, UNHCR, and Burmese forced migrants.
	Different stakeholders in Peacebuilding	Secondary Data/interviews
What strategies do NGOs and the politically active Burmese forced migrants implement, and what kind of tools are available for them?	Organizations, Institutions	Secondary Data and interviews - The Border Consortium - Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma

### *Interviewing & Primary Qualitative Data*

In addition to immersion into the local community in Bangkok, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with relevant actors. These included representatives of ALTSEAN-Burma, The Border Consortium, the former interns of ALTSEAN-Burma who have worked on the “No Peace Without You” campaign, and Burmese forced migrants themselves who work with Burmese forced migrant population in the peace processes.

I requested interviews with people who were involved in the peace processes through supporting roles, identified mostly through media coverage and further recommendations by interviewees. Other individuals and organizations that had been contacted include Chris Lewa, a well-known consultant on Rohingya<sup>3</sup> refugee causes, Calvary Baptist Church-Burmese Ministry, Jesuit Refugee Service, Burmese Rohingya Association Thailand, and Women of Burma but the aforementioned organizations were selected because of their closest relevance for the purpose of the research.

### *Secondary Data*

The relevant information on the population within the camps was abundant, so the secondary data analysis in this paper mostly relies on literature reviews and reports. A number of reports - official progress reports, narrative reports, annual reports and project evaluation report of UNHCR, UN Peacebuilding Commission and UN Peacebuilding Support Office were used as well as the ‘grey data’ of the NGOs ALTSEAN-Burma, The Border Consortium, Thai Committee for Refugees, Refugees International, and Jesuit Refugee Services – form the main sources of secondary data. For qualitative analysis, a body of literatures on diaspora, peace-building and Burmese forced migrants (in the context of refugee camp settings) was assessed.

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<sup>3</sup> A Burmese ethnic minority group.

## **1.6 Organization of the Paper**

This paper is organized into five main chapters. The first chapter has served as an overview of the research, introducing the research topic of forced migrants in peacebuilding. The second chapter provides a contextual background for Burmese forced migrants in Thailand, providing a rationale for this particular research. The chapter three describes the conceptual framework that serves as a critical lens for analyzing the current paradigm of peacebuilding, and challenges this unilateral, top-to-bottom relationship from the perspective of transnationalism. Chapter four further delves into the predicaments of Burmese migrants in Thailand, examining what kind of challenges they face as well as potential opportunities in the context of peacebuilding. Chapter five then presents an analysis of the forced migrants' role in peace processes, highlights the opportunity their unique position in international politics offers them to function as distant peace workers. The chapter also presents examples of peacebuilding assistance provided by two NGOs, The Border Consortium (TBC) and Alternative ASEAN Network for Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma), through their 'No Peace Without You' Campaign. The concluding chapter provides an overview of the study findings and their implication on the peacebuilding paradigm.

## Chapter 2 Contextual Background

### 2.1 Introduction

Map 2.1 Refugee camp locations



(Source: [TBC](#))

Sixty-four years and running, the internal conflict in Burma infamously carries the title of ‘the world’s longest-running civil war,’ which began shortly after the country’s independence from the United Kingdom in 1948. Since the coup d’état of 2 March 1962, which saw the military led by General Ne Win taking control of Burma (Myanmar), successive central governments of Burma have fought a myriad of rebellions, as well as per-

petrating consistent and systematic human rights violations against the civilians, including genocide, employing child soldiers, systematic gender-based violence, slavery, human trafficking and a lack of freedom of speech.<sup>4</sup>

Many Burmese refugees<sup>5</sup> have fled the on-going civil conflict, which involves causes and rights for several ethnic minorities, political ideology, demands for participatory rights, and access to natural resources such as oil, timber, and land (Snyder 2011:4). The neighboring countries of Burma host large numbers of displaced people from Burma (Egreteau 2012:121), sometimes in camps (Bowles 1998:3), sometimes in urban environments, and sometimes in detention centers. Many from Burma have had their citizenship denied and are considered stateless (Barbour, 2012). This chapter presents a preliminary overview to provide a historic background of the plight of Burmese forced migrants. The chapter will also introduce two main Non-Governmental Organizations, Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma and The Border Consortium, who work with the Burmese forced migrants in Thailand.

## 2.2 Recent Political Changes

Myanmar's political environment saw unprecedented political developments, witnessing the transition from military rule to a civilian Government in 2011 and 2012. The change was highlighted by the release of arguably Burma's most prominent human rights activist, Aung San Suu Kyi, in 2011, and the subsequent historic dialogue between President Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi, whose political faction, National League for Democracy, won 43 out of 45 seats in April 2012 by democratic elections. The military began relinquishing more of its control over the government, and the negotiations between the government and ethnic armed groups have resulted in a series of ceasefire agreements that have brought relative peace to the often-insecure southeastern part of the country.

The cessation of hostilities marks significant progress for Burmese refugees in Thailand: the vast majority of those registered and living in the Thai camps originate from areas in Burma where ceasefires have been announced. While the peace is still fragile, it has increased the prospects for voluntary returns to the country.

Thailand is at the centre of ever-larger migratory movements in the region, and hosts an estimated 2 million migrants. Such numbers can lead to a blurring of the distinction between asylum-seekers and those coming predominantly for economic reasons. The country has had to deal with an influx of refugees from surrounding conflict-ridden countries, with at its height over one million Indochinese refugees on its territory. This was followed by arrivals of Burmese migrants (Brees 2008:384). Because of these massive refugee inflows (the distinction between refugees and forced migrants is discussed below), Thailand considers itself to be an exceptional case and has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and currently does not have an official refugee law or functioning asylum procedures (HRW, 2012). The government prefers to have freedom in managing these refugee flows (Hyndman 2002:42), lest that observance to international regulation might

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<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, Human Rights in Burma (5 June 2013), available at <http://www.hrw.org/burma>.

force them to receive even more refugees, thereby possibly threatening their own sovereignty and security (Loescher and Milner, as cited in Brees 2008:384). Thailand is on the other hand a member of the Executive Committee of UNHCR, which means that they do adhere to world refugee trends and ways to handle refugees (Muntharbhorn, as cited in Brees 2008:384).

The asylum-seekers and refugees living outside the camps and in urban areas are considered illegal migrants under Thailand's immigration law and are subject to arrest, detention and/or deportation, regardless of whether or not they carry a UNHCR registration card. Although Thailand is not party to either of the statelessness conventions, amendments to the Civil Registration Act in 2008<sup>6</sup> provide for universal birth registration. This allows for the issuance of birth certificates to all children born in the country (*jus soil*), regardless of the status of their parents, and will help avoid intergenerational statelessness. As of 31 December 2011, government statistics indicate that some 506,200 people were deemed to be stateless.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.3 Refugees Or Forced Migrants

According to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee can be defined as a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted (...) is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." It has been since extended to include forced migrants in 'refugee-like situations.' According to the 1967 UNHCR Mandate, it can also be defined as a person fleeing his country of origin because of "serious (including indiscriminate) threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order," notably from environmental disaster, environmental collapse, and state fragility (Betts and Loescher 2010:2). Generally speaking, Betts and Loescher (2010) pinpoints the common conceptual feature of refugee situation as "the unwillingness or inability of the country of origin to ensure the protection of its own citizens, and hence the need for international protection"(3), indicated by "significant human rights violations (civil, political, economic, social, and cultural) to which they have no domestic remedy"(5).

Although there is a clear demarcation of 'migrants' from 'refugees' according to official standards, the categorization is blurred in reality: for instance, both groups work, despite the fact that refugees are supposed to be confined to the camp, and the term 'migrants' conceals the fact that the great majority of them had no option of staying in their home country – including the case of Burmese refugees. Indeed, political and economic root causes in Burma cannot be seen as isolated factors, which makes it hard to distinguish economic migrants from asylum seekers and refugees (Brees 2008:383). Although the ultimate push factor may come from the lack of economic opportunities and poverty, the root causes of the displacement are political and military (Brees 2008:383; Ying 2013, personal interview<sup>8</sup>). They are all fleeing their homes because of the permeating state of

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<sup>6</sup> Available at [http://thailaws.com/law/t\\_laws/tlaw0381.pdf](http://thailaws.com/law/t_laws/tlaw0381.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> 2013 UNHCR Country Operations Profile-Thailand, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e489646.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Personal interview with Ying, a Karin-ethnic Burmese forced migrant residing in Bangkok, Bangkok, 13 May 2013.

human insecurity, human rights abuses, livelihood failures and lack of protection from the militant government (Egreteau 2012:116; Brees 2008:383).

*[Translated from Thai] "I left Burma because I couldn't find a job. Karens always have had fights with [Bamar, the dominant ethnic] Burmese, so it was hard."- Ying 2013, personal interview.*"<sup>9</sup>

This research therefore uses the vernacular term 'forced migrants' instead to include not only those who qualify for the legal status under the 1951 Refugee convention, but also 'survival migrants' (Betts and Kaytaz 2009). The all-embracing definitional approach is more realistic, given that many Burmese families split up to diversify their livelihoods, with some members residing inside and others outside refugee camps (Brees 2008:383).<sup>10</sup>

## 2.4 Burmese Forced Migrants in Thailand

The number of Burmese arrivals has been growing steadily, because of both pull factors of Thailand's labour shortage caused by economic growth, and consequent higher wages, as well as push factors of the Burmese Government's catastrophic economic policy and the violent events of the popular rising in 1988 (Brees 2008:382). Refugees from Burma in Thailand have been confined to nine closed camps since they began arriving in the 1980s, constituting one of the most protracted displacement situations in the world. Thailand currently hosts some 84,900 registered refugees and an estimated 62,000 unregistered asylum-seekers who have fled from conflict and human rights violations in Burma in nine camps along the Thai-Burmese border (UNHCR, 2013). Most are from the bordering states and regions of South East Burma, which has seen ethnic hostilities, disrupting their livelihoods. Those who are not fleeing armed conflicts, but other human rights violations, are not recognized as refugees (Brees 2008:384).

Several changes were made in 2005, including the Thai government's decision to offer protection to those fleeing political persecution in their country of origin, if they moved to the refugee camps. All the refugees who had previously registered with UNHCR but had not moved to camps were considered illegal from March 2005. The Thai government also agreed a third country resettlement programme with Western countries, which is currently the only durable solution available for the Burmese. The refugees who wish to be resettled through the programme have since left Thailand (McArthur 2013, personal interview<sup>11</sup>). Since 2005, the third-country resettlement has provided solutions for more than 80,000 refugees. Although this could create another pull factor for new arrivals, the Thai government has in practice closed the border by refusing to register new arrivals and as such denying them protection (Brees 2008:384; McArthur 2013, personal inter-

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<sup>9</sup> See above.

<sup>10</sup> The family-splitting strategy is employed as the most efficient risk diversification for displaced people, as refugees are only able to survive by strategically placing members inside and outside camps, with the most vulnerable ones inside in order to minimize risks and profit from food and non food rations (Horst, as cited in Brees 2008:390). This earnings from the work outside camp provides income to the refugees to make additional purchases to supplement the rations distributed in camps (Brees 2008:390).

<sup>11</sup> Personal interview with McArthur, D., Thai Border Consortium Emergency Reponse Director, Bangkok, 31 July 2013.

view<sup>12</sup>). Though the number of registered Burmese refugees in the camps saw a decrease of more than 20,000 since 2010, the camp population has not declined substantially: the number of unregistered people in the camps has grown to an estimated 62,000<sup>13</sup>. The 78.9% of the forced migrants and Internally Displaced People camp population, both in Thailand and in Burma, consists of Karen ethnic minority, followed by 9.8% of Karenni group<sup>14</sup>. Since the statistics on the migrants do not include children and the number of illegal people is unknown (Egretau 2012:123), it is estimated that there are at least two million Burmese forced migrants residing in Thailand, a significant minority population in a country of 66 million (Brees 2008:382; World Bank 2013).

Brees (2008:388) categorizes the Burmese population in Thailand into four parts, depending on the time of arrival and the destination in Thailand (Huguet and Punpuing; IOM; UNHCR, as cited in Brees 2008:388): ‘Displaced persons fleeing fighting’ and Burmese political activists (Convention refugees called ‘Persons of Concern’), registered with UNHCR; legally present migrants; legally working migrants; and, illegal migrant workers (Egretau 2012:120). Some have lived in the camps for decades, while others are more recent arrivals, having fled the conflicts and economic policies that jeopardize their lives in contemporary Burma (Snyder 2011: 4).

While many Burmese now live in refugee camps, countless more are living outside those camps, contributing to Thailand’s rapid economic growth by working in factories, food packing centers, and on the urban construction sites, which often entails the three Ds jobs: dirty, dangerous and degrading (ALTSEAN-Burma, 2012). These refugees, however, fill the crucial labor gap that Thai nationally have passed on. Since the refugees are considered ‘illegal migrants’ outside the camp, they risk being exposed to exploitation and are in no position to demand employment rights and benefits such as the minimum wage (Brees, 2008:390; Jacobsen 2006:276). The UNDP Human Development Report released in 2009, however, explains the Thailand’s continued attraction, stating that “Someone born in Thailand can expect to live seven more years, to have almost three times as many years of education, and save almost eight times as much as someone born in Myanmar [Burma]”<sup>15</sup>.

Since the vast majority of migrant workers in Thailand are unregistered and illegal, not much information about their demographics is available. In July 2009, the Thai government began implementing nationality verification and registration processes for the migrant laborers. According to the Memorandum of Understanding between Burma and Thailand, which was modelled after the other agreements with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members, signed in June 2003, migrants from Burma are entitled to stay and work in Thailand upon verification of their nationality.<sup>16</sup> The program requires that migrant workers obtain passports and formally apply for a two-year work

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<sup>12</sup> See above.

<sup>13</sup> 2013 UNHCR Country Operations Profile-Thailand, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e489646.html>.

<sup>14</sup> The Border Consortium’s camp population figures, available at <http://theborderconsortium.org/camps/2013-05-may-map-tbc-unhcr.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Programme Report, 2009. Although this is may be a static pull factor, it might not be included in the thought process of forced migration.

<sup>16</sup> International Organization for Migration, Migration Information Note, August 2009, available at [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs08/IOM-Migrant\\_Info\\_Note\\_No2\(en\).pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs08/IOM-Migrant_Info_Note_No2(en).pdf).

visa in Thailand. While the program's requirements seem reasonable enough, implementation in real life has faced a number of challenges.

According to a joint press release issued by the State Enterprise Workers Relations Confederation, the Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF), and the Thai Labor Solidarity Committee, Thai authorities failed to provide clear information to Burmese migrant workers and NGOs about the National Verification process. Moreover, while the aims of the National Verification scheme are positive, it does not provide unregistered workers sufficient incentive to participate.

## **2.5 Non-Government Organizations Working with Burmese Forced Migrants**

### ***2.5.1 The Border Consortium (TBC)***

The UNHCR usually takes charge of most refugee situations as the primary caretaker, overseeing camp management in addition to the provision of basic resources and services to the refugee population. Thailand's situation indicates an exception, however, as the Royal Thai Government refused to allow the UNHCR to undertake a practical role in the border refugee camps until the late 1990s, a decision which was linked to a broader policy of refuting that this was in fact a 'refugee' situation (TBBC, as cited in McConnachie 2012:40). Instead, service provision has been undertaken by The Border Consortium (TBC), which provides food, building materials and other essential supplies to the refugee camps (McConnachie 2012:40).

Established in 1984, The Border Consortium is a non-governmental organization, consisting of ten international members<sup>17</sup>, which works with Burmese forced migrants, assisting in addressing humanitarian needs and supporting community driven solutions in pursuit of peace and development. The organization initially provided ad-hoc emergency support for the refugees, from a number of small aid agencies forming an informal consortium, and gradually become a multi-membership aid organization with a mandate from the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to provide food, shelter and non-food items for all the refugees along the border and in response to emergencies (TBC, n.d.a).

TBC's main activities consist of providing food, shelter and capacity-building support to Burmese forced migrants. The NGO also provides support for camp management through the refugee committees in refugee camp settings, most of which are placed along the border. Recently, an increasing importance has been placed on promoting self-reliance of displaced people through development and utilization of available resources. TBC continuously updates their programme to keep up with the changing circumstances. As mentioned previously, recent political developments in Burma have signaled a possi-

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<sup>17</sup> The Border Consortium consists of ten international members, Caritas (Switzerland), Christian Aid (UK and Ireland), Church World Service (USA), DanChurchAid (Denmark), Diakonia (Sweden), ICCO (Netherlands), International Rescue Committee (USA), NCCA-Act for Peace (Australia), Norwegian Church Aid (Norway), and ZOA Refugee Care (Netherlands).

bility of reconciliation, so TBC is involved in supporting peace-building initiatives, promoting the refugees' political rights participation, and accommodating their leadership and management roles so that they can advocate and negotiate themselves. TBC also conducts research into the ongoing causes of internal displacement in South East Burma (TBC, n.d.b).

TBC's programme responds to the humanitarian emergency and rehabilitation needs of Burmese refugees in following ways (n.d.b): Provision of basic a food ration; Support of Supplementary Feeding Programmes and Nursery School lunches; Nutrition education, monitoring and research; Support of Food Security initiatives: Community, Agriculture and Nutrition project – training, seed and tool distribution, and establishment of garden allotments; Provision of shelter materials and cooking fuel, including environmentally sustainable shelter livelihood activities; Entrepreneur development, grants, savings and loans project; Support and capacity building of camp management; Participation in Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT)/ UNHCR Protection Sub Committee and Camp Management Working Group; Displacement documentation; Advocacy for change.

### ***2.5.2 Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma)***

Formed at the conclusion of the Alternative ASEAN Meeting on Burma held in October 1996, ALTSEAN-Burma is a regional network of organizations, support groups and individuals based in ASEAN member states contributing to the political movement for human rights and democracy in Burma. Its aim is to support exiled groups, especially via advocacy groups and capacity building (Padi 2013, personal interview). The members include human rights & social justice NGOs, political parties, think tanks, academics, journalists and student activists (ALTSEAN, n.d.). The network is engaged in advocacy, campaigns and capacity-building programmes to support a free and democratic Burma.

ALTSEAN-Burma works with the democracy movement and its supporters to produce resources and create opportunities for building and strengthening strategic relationships among key networks and organizations from Burma, ASEAN and the international community; implementing innovative strategies that are responsive to emerging needs and urgent developments; inspiring and building confidence for empowerment among activists, particularly women, youth and all ethnic groups of Burma (ALTSEAN, n.d.). The network provides support advocacy for the (forced migrant) activists to represent themselves at Human Rights council, and the U.N., as well as facilitating communication with the media through interviews supported by the research theme (Padi 2013, personal interview). It also provides capacity-building training programmes for Burmese organizations in two categories: economic literacy training, by providing language lessons and basic economic lessons; and, advocacy training.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

There has been a steady influx of forced migrants into Thailand, most notably from Burma, some of who reside in refugee camps, while the others reside outside for various reasons. Although there is a clear legal demarcation between the terms 'migrant,' and 'refugee,' as the main push factor lies in the political and economic struggles, the economic migrant can also be distinguished as 'forced migrant' in case of Burmese population in

Thailand. There are two NGOs that would be discussed in the study: The Border Consortium (TBC), which functions as the main provider of services and supplies to the Burmese refugee camps in Thailand; Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, an umbrella organization represents a collaboration of human rights groups from various ASEAN civil societies.

## **Chapter 3 Theoretical Concepts and Analytical Framework**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses peacebuilding and transnationalism that will be used as the main analytical framework for the study, forming the basis for anchoring the role of forced migrants in the on-going peace process. It covers theoretical reflections on these concepts, and the subsequent analysis of Burmese forced migrants in following chapters will be built on these analyses.

### **3.2 Peacebuilding**

The following are some of the hegemonic definitions of peacebuilding. In his 1992 report, “An Agenda for Peace” former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali introduced the concept of peacebuilding to the UN as “action to identify and support structures, which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict”(1992).

The Brahimi Report of 2000 defined peacebuilding as “activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war” (paragraph 13).

The UN Secretary-General’s Policy Committee has described peacebuilding as

“A range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.”

These definitions outline the ultimate goal of peacebuilding as establishing sustainable peace by reducing and eliminating violent conflicts. Broadly, peacebuilding can be categorized as two main segments. First, as a direct process, it addresses the causes, or the driving forces of conflict. Secondly, it can be understood as intersectional activities to contribute to peace, including economic development, humanitarian assistance, governance, (human) security, justice among others (Alliance for Peacebuilding, n.d).

Internationally, there are numerous organizations supporting various peace processes around the world. Although most of the UN organizations work towards the goal of peacebuilding, the UN peacebuilding initiatives are specifically delegated under the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, which has three components: Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Fund, and the Peacebuilding Support Office. Created in 2006, the Peacebuilding Commission is an intergovernmental advisory body to the General As-

sembly and the Security Council, the Peacebuilding Fund provides funding for peacebuilding priorities and the Peacebuilding Support Office supports the Peacebuilding Commission in carrying out its mandates, administers the Peacebuilding Fund and supports the Secretary General's efforts to coordinate the UN System in the area of peacebuilding (United Nations 2010).

The United Nations identify the following as the forefront needs of peacebuilding: support to basic safety and security, including land mine action, protection of civilians, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, strengthening the rule of law and initiation of security sector reform; support to political processes, including electoral processes, and promoting inclusive dialogue and reconciliation; support to the provision of basic services, such as water and sanitation, health and primary education, and support to the safe and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced people; support to restoring core government functions, particularly basic public administration and public finance; support to economic revitalization, including creating jobs, particularly for youth and demobilized former combatants (United Nations 2010).

The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission currently identifies the following as the essential features of peace-building: “An early start: Peace-building starts when violent conflict ends, or even before. The risk of relapse means the first two years are crucial for long-term success; National ownership: Peace-building is primarily a national challenge and responsibility. Developing national capacity is a priority from day one; Common strategy: Nationally owned and based on a country’s needs, a common strategy sets the priorities for action” (UNPSO, 2010). PBC further clarifies, “National ownership is critical and it involves all national actors and stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and the general public. It is therefore the citizens of countries where peacebuilding is underway who are primarily responsible for building lasting peace. In most post-conflict countries they are supported by a range of international actors, including peacekeepers and development and humanitarian staff whose efforts the UN is often expected to coordinate and lead” (UN 2010). These features are somewhat vague as it is not clear whether the forced migrants are included in the usage of the term ‘national’ or ‘citizens’ as they currently reside outside of the home country’s territory and some are considered ‘stateless.’ However, it is mentioned that peacebuilding is considered to be a task for everyone, “from national governments, civil society and local communities to international partners, whether they are involved in peacekeeping, development or humanitarian activities” (UNPSO, 2010).

PBC also classifies civil society organizations as an important actor in peacebuilding, encouraging their active participation with the enabling resolutions (UNPSO, 2010). For example, civil society representatives have been invited to present at several UNPC meetings, and it is claimed there are established instruments to ensure that serious and field-based civil society organizations are recognized, and receive a seat and a voice in the Commission’s deliberations. One aspect that the United Nations has yet to address is the role of the private sector in peacebuilding, from the simplest form of engagement and in-country informal contacts to transformative multi-stakeholder partnerships.

### ***3.2.1 The Limited Scope of Current Paradigm***

The early work of the Peace Building Commission was dedicated exclusively to activities within the target country, and both the regional nature of conflict or the significant displaced populations resulting from these conflicts were largely ignored. Milner (2008:5) criticized this approach as a “myopic, country-specific approach.” Such a limited approach blocks viewing a holistic picture including factors and relevant actors outside the territorial boundaries that could potentially spoil post-conflict reconciliation. Moreover, it adopted an incomplete understanding of the relations between long-term displacement and peacebuilding, incorporating the issue of forced migrants only as far as the return and reintegration of refugees is taken to be an indicator of the success of reconciliation efforts (Allen and Turton, as cited in Kibreab 2003:25).

Furthermore, the main criticisms for the current peace-building paradigm can be distinguished into two ways: implementation and west-centric cultural hegemony. Barnett *et al.* criticizes peace-building organizations for undertaking supply rather than demand-driven peace-building activities (2007:48), extending their existing mandates and specialized competencies into the post-conflict area, “reflecting bureaucratic inertia and building on existing areas of comparative advantage” while not necessarily reflecting the needs of the recipients. In addition, it is argued the organizations are likely to adopt a definition of peace-building that is in line with their already existing mandates, worldviews, and interests, resulting in significant differences of interpretation regarding the meaning and practice of peace-building (Barnett et al 2007:53). These strategies are based on precedent organizational mandates rather than “best practices” of empirical analysis, suggesting that any initiatives of international coordination and collaboration will be politically biased.

It has been argued also that peacebuilding is another manifestation of Western cultural hegemony that is, the imposition of Western values and practices onto post-conflict areas. Barnett *et al* (2007:51) argues that many peace-building programs’ goals are to create an economically liberal and democratic state that “respects human rights; protects the rule of law; is constrained by representative institutions, a vigilant media, and periodic elections; and protects markets.” This liberal bias has to be approached cautiously, however, as it may not necessarily promote peace. On the contrary, pursuing the ideals of liberalization and democratization during the peace processes may foster the conditions for conflict if security and stable institutions are not simultaneously pursued.

While there is growing empirical evidence to suggest that effective peace-building strategies should involve holistic long-term activities planned to support the security, political, economic and justice and reconciliation needs of a post-conflict area (Ali and Matthews, as cited in Milner 2008), there is a distinctive lack of mandate to undertake this full range of activities. A stronger institutional coherence is needed to ensure that peace-building processes are carried out more effectively and systematically (Milner, 2008: 3).

## **3.3 Transnationalism**

The term transnationalism generally refers to “increasing transborder relations of individuals, groups, firms and to mobilizations beyond state boundaries. Individuals, groups, institutions and states interact with each other in a new global space where cultural and

political characteristic of national societies are combined with emerging multilevel and multinational activities,” (UNESCO, n.d.) thus transcending the national space as the primary reference point for activities and identities. The concept signifies multiplicity of ties and interactions connecting individuals and institutions across the borders of states (Egreteau 2012:130; Vertovec 1999).

Diasporas are seen as a historical predecessor to contemporary transnationalism. Diaspora as a social form can be characterized by their ‘triadic relationship’ (Sheffer; Safran, as cited in Vertovec 1999:3; Egreteau 2012:118) between “(a) globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups, (b) the territorial states and contexts where such groups reside, and (c) the homeland states and contexts whence they or their forebears came” (Vertovec 1999:3). As Schiller et al (1992:1) describes transnationalism is “the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement,” with the manifestation of a social process in which migrants establish social fields that transcend “geographic, cultural, and political borders.” Transnational migration is a pattern of migration in which persons maintain on-going social connections with the polity from which they originated. In transnational migration people “literally live their lives across international borders” (Schiller et al, as cited in Guarnizo et al 2003:1212).

Migrants are understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations, familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political, that span territorial borders. The migrants’ multi-layered involvements in both the home and host societies are a central element of transnationalism. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns within a field of social relations that links together their country of origin and their new host country or countries, influencing both societies (Schiller et al 1992: ix).

A noticeable feature pivotal in analyzing the phenomenon of transnational social formations is the concept of structures or systems of relationships best described as networks (Vertovec 1999:3). New technologies are the driving forces behind today’s transnational networks, according to Castells (as cited in Vertovec 1999:3). The technological revolution that has made transportation and communication more accessible and affordable is the main catalyst behind shaping modern transnationalism, transforming the traditionally confined relationship between people and places. The territorial and social closure that once defined nation-states is fading. With new technologies, especially with rapidly improving telecommunications, that connect transnational networks with increasing speed and efficiency, transmigrants are more mobile, and can now maintain closer and more frequent interaction with their home societies than ever before (Vertovec 1999:1). It should be noted, however, the technologies do not necessarily create new social patterns but rather, they enhance pre-existing ones (Baser and Swain 2008:8; Vertovec 1999:3). Gupta and Ferguson (as cited in Vertovec 1999:3-4) argued, “Something like a transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete. At the same time, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount.” This signals a paradigm shift in international communications and interactions.

Previously isolated population of diasporas has now evolved into ‘transnational communities’ sustained by a range of modes of social organization, mobility and communications (Egretau 2012:118; Vertovec 1999:4). The notion of a transnational community highlights human agency, as such groups are the result of cross-border activities, which link individuals, families and local groups (UNESCO, n.d.). Global media and communications are becoming an increasingly significant channel for the flow of cultural phenomena and the transformation of identity. Appadurai and Breckenridge contend that “Complex transnational flows of media images and messages perhaps create the greatest disjunctures for diasporic populations, since in the electronic media in particular, the politics of desire and imagination are always in contest with the politics of heritage and nostalgia” (as cited in Vertovec 1999:6-7) as transnational media, especially of the Internet in today’s increasingly interconnected world, applies a considerable impression on shaping transmigrants’ unique identity of ‘being neither here or there.’ Being a transmigrant is perhaps best described as functioning as the linchpin, being engaged with two societies connected through the transnational social practices of the immigrants (Itzigsohn 2002:770).

Transnational activities are defined as “those that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants. Such activities may be conducted by relatively powerful actors, such as representatives of national governments and multinational corporations, or may be initiated by more modest individuals, such as immigrants and their home country kin and relations. These activities are not limited to economic enterprises, but include political, cultural and religious initiatives as well” (Portes, as cited in UNESCO, n.d.). The resulting new social fields are the product of a spectrum of intersecting economic, political, and sociocultural activities (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, as cited in Itzigsohn 2002: 768).

### ***3.3.1 Economic Transnational Activities***

Economic transnational activities such as business investments in home countries, through foreign direct investment and portfolio investment and monetary remittances are possibly the most debated influence that migrants can exert from abroad. In 2012, The World Bank estimated worldwide remittances, including those to high-income countries, to total \$534 billion, and projected its growth to \$685 billion in 2015. Of the \$534 billion, remittance flows to the developing world claimed a significant portion (\$406 billion), an increase of 6.5 percent over the previous year, far exceeding the total amount of official development assistance during the same period. Remittances to developing countries are projected to grow by 7.9 percent in 2013, 10.1 percent in 2014 and 10.7 percent in 2015 to reach \$534 billion in 2015. The significant inflow of resources may suggest that for some developing countries, the prospects of their economic development may be linked to, if not dependent upon, the economic activities of their respective diaspora populations.

### ***3.3.2 Political Transnational Activities***

Political transnational activities encompass both indirect and direct participation in the political realms, “[and] usually aims to publicize the cause of an exile community, collect funds worldwide to then formulate policies that can pressure their home government and initiate political and democratic change” (Egretau 2012:129). It can take the form of something as simple and obvious as retaining membership in political parties in one’s

country of origin and exercising the voting rights of their citizenship. Political parties from some countries have offices in immigrant settlements, while political candidates regularly campaign among diaspora population to obtain their political and monetary support (Graham; McDonnell; Itzigsohn et al, as cited in Guarnizo 2003:4). Less noticeable but still significant roles include the diffusion of political ideology and information, which can indirectly impel the government of their home countries.

### ***3.3.3 Sociocultural Transnational Activities***

Sociocultural transnationalism is the emergence of practices of sociability, mutual help, and public rituals that recreate a sense of community based on cultural understandings of belonging and social obligations, which cover a wide range of social and cultural interactions through which ideas and information are disseminated (Itzigsohn 2002:767, 788).

Levitt has defined ‘social remittances’ as the ideas, values and cultural artefacts that travel between countries (as cited in Spear, 2006:9). Social remittances serve as a unique form of social capital between migrants and those who remain at home. These transfers of socio-cultural meanings and practices occur either during the visits that immigrants make back to their original countries or visits made by non-migrants to friends and families living in the receiving countries or through the dramatically increased forms of correspondences, both traditional and the latest technological.

In the context of Burmese forced migrants in Thailand, the conditions for transnationalism (Lubkemann, as cited in Brees 2009b) are all present: historical patterns of migration between the two countries; robust informal labor markets in peri-urban host settings; conditions of persistent insecurity, which encourage the development of strategies of risk diversification; persistent armed conflict; porous international borders.

## **3.4 Conclusion**

The current paradigm of peacebuilding, as defined by hegemonic organizations, has been mentioned in this chapter, which is criticized for its narrow, restrictive approach. While there is growing empirical evidence to suggest that effective peacebuilding strategies should involve holistic long-term activities planned to support the security, political, economic and justice and reconciliation needs of a post-conflict area (Ali and Matthews, as cited in Milner 2008), there is a distinctive lack of mandate to undertake this full range of activities. A stronger institutional coherence is needed to ensure that peacebuilding process is carried out more effectively and systematically (Milner, 2008: 3). The concept of transnationalism was also introduced, segmented into three categories-economic, political and sociocultural, which would be used as the main analytical framework to debate the influence of Burmese forced migrants in peacebuilding in the subsequent chapters.

## Chapter 4 The predicaments of Burmese forced migrants in Thailand

### 4.1 Introduction

The traditional depiction of forced migrants, or refugees, in international politics usually portrays them as passive victims of conflicts. The defining word of ‘fear’<sup>18</sup> is chosen to describe the emotional state of refugees in the 1951 Convention. The word cements the individuals defined in the image of meek, vulnerable social outcasts, lacking full reasoning capacity and incapable of presenting an autonomous, self-governing form of personal subjectivity (Nyers, 2006:xvii). This view of refugees illustrates them as silent, or rather, silenced, due to the absence of the ‘proper’ political subjectivity, i.e. state citizenship, a legitimate portal through which they can convey their political opinions. In other words, refugees are only defined negatively (Shacknove, as cited in Zetter 1991:46), defined by their lack of two privileges of political identity (citizenship) and community (nation-state) (Kibreab 2003:25; Limbu 2009: 258; Zetter 2007:177), represented as the “inverted mirror image of the citizen” (Nyers 2006:18).

Rather than being a deviation, however, Haddad (as cited in Betts and Loescher 2010:15) argues that sovereignty and refugees are mutually constituted elements; they are a part of the social construction of the state system. It is argued that not only are refugees an inevitable consequence of the state system but that they have historically helped to reinforce and socially construct state sovereignty (Zetter 1991). The conceptualization of refugee has contributed to reinforcing and legitimating the sovereign state system by creating clear notions of insider and outsider and establishing the refugee as an ‘other,’ which can be offered a form of ‘quasicitizenship’ before being reintegrated within the ‘normal’ order of the state system (Haddad, as cited in Betts and Loescher 2010:15). Refugees therefore symbolize an aberration or failure of the state system, for which the ad hoc refugee regimes aim to redress. Refugees are not supposed to be political agents; it is a prerogative belonging only to citizenship (Nyers, 2006:xvii).

This chapter further delves into the quandary of Burmese forced migrants in Thailand, discussing their position in current peacebuilding process, and the tribulations they face. It is then followed by the discussion of peacebuilding process in Burma, and present the dominant depiction of forced migrants’ role in peacebuilding-as ‘peace spoilers.’

### 4.2 The current situation of Burmese forced migrants in Thailand

Historically, the Thai-Burmese border, currently at its 1800km-length, has been porous, geographically speaking, as neither the Thai or Burmese government has been able to enforce strict control over it (McArthur 2013, personal interview<sup>19</sup>). In order to receive

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<sup>18</sup> Article 1(A)(2): “[...] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion[...].”

<sup>19</sup> Personal interview with McArthur, D., Thai Border Consortium Emergency Reponse Director, Bangkok, 31 July 2013.

assistance and protection, many Burmese forced migrants settle in one of the refugee camps upon entering Thailand (Bowles 1998:3; Brees 2009a). Since the government of Thailand does not officially recognize refugee status, those residing outside a camp are considered illegal, and consequently are at the risk of arrest, detention and subsequent deportation (Jacobsen 2006:276). Why then, do most Burmese forced migrants choose to settle outside the camps? The push factors are far more important in this case than the pull factors (Jacobsen 2006:276), such as aforementioned generating subsidization income, Brees argues (2009a:24), and the choice of settlement is often unrelated to the causes of the flight. Many of the political activists are self-settled, in Mae Sot<sup>20</sup> and Chiang Mai<sup>21</sup>, as much opposition work is impossible from inside the remote camps; they prefer to have no support than to lose their freedom of mobility and self-reliance: ‘They are acting on their own behalf and, in so doing, point to the potential for an alternative refugee development policy that can genuinely benefit both refugees and their hosts’ (Hovil, as cited in Brees 2008:381). Despite the official policy, which is against refugee labour, many of the forced migrants do work as illegal migrant workers and make a significant contribution to the Thai economy, both directly in the form of low cost labor and indirectly, by enlarging the market for local suppliers and by attracting international aid money (Hyndman 2002: 42; Brees 2008:383). The Thai government is against legalizing the labor status of migrant workers and entails the assumed dearth of control over the refugees. This assumption perhaps overestimates the control that the government currently holds over the camp settings – refugees cannot be strictly controlled in the camps either, and self-settled forced migrants often fall outside the radar of any governmental or non-governmental agent anyway. Acknowledging people the rights that they ought to have according to international standards will hold them accountable for their actions, so they have obligations to respect societal norms such as refraining from illegal activities, respecting local environment regulations and paying taxes (Brees 2008: 385).

Hosting states can contribute to durable solutions for forced migrants beyond providing financial support, by supporting resettlement, local integration, or repatriation. However, host governments all around the world have been increasingly hesitant to provide resettlement and local integration plans for forced migrants, and have instead opted for repatriation as ‘the preferred durable solution’ (Betts and Loescher 2010:18). Such countries play an important role in political transnationalism. In Thailand’s case, this meant suppressing the political agency of the forced migrants by cracking down on activist urban refugees and diaspora organizations, and, lately, on rebel organizations, thus driving them further underground (McConnachie 2012:38).

The seize of a Thai hospital by a Burmese non-state armed groups in 2000, for example, raised concerns amongst Thai public and government about homeland security threats posed by the Burmese activists and insurgents on Thai soil. In 2001, with the newly appointed Prime Minister Shinawatra, Thai foreign policy was geared towards economic prospects. Given Burma’s extensive natural resources, the Thai government wanted to

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<sup>20</sup> A border town in western Thailand

<sup>21</sup> The largest city in northern Thailand. It has been a transnational hub of Burmese (political) dissidents since the 1990s, as well as becoming one of the most visible sites of intra-community divisions (Egreteau 2012:133).

revive its relations with Burma's incumbent militant junta and cracked down on all Burmese activists in Thailand. The Thai government has had an ambivalent approach to diplomacy with the Burmese government; while it is in favor of good relations with the regime, in the past it supported the Karen, an ethnic minority, insurgency – the Thai government suddenly changed its allegiance in early 2009 (McConnachie 2012:38). As a result of this new policy, all registered urban forced migrants, including many activists, were ordered by the Thai government to move to the refugee camps, ending all protection outside the camps. In addition, the offices of diaspora organizations working on democracy, human rights or advocacy were monitored and raided by the Thai government. Worsening the situation, due to the illegal status of many of these organizations and their members, it was hard to protest against the Thai government's act of hostility (McConnachie 2012:37).

The choices made by the host government about how it treats forced migrants reflect many factors, such as diplomatic relationship with their home country, and the social position of the forced migrants in the new community, with perhaps security issues weighing significantly more than other issues. Nevertheless, host governments confronted with protracted refugee situations, such as that of Burmese forced migrants in Thailand, would do well to see refugees and the resources that accompany them – including the aforementioned capacity for remittances – as a potential asset for state-building. (McConnachie 2012:47-48).

### 4.3 The Peace Processes in Burma

Burma currently does not have a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, or a UN peace-keeping mandate. Initial ceasefire agreements have been signed between non-state armed groups and the nominally civilian government in 2011 and 2012. There was no peace talk 26 months ago; the first ceasefire began in September 2011. Ironically, the democratic election of November 20, 2011 caused more displacement in the first year and half after the election, than 14 years prior to the election. Since then, there have been about 18<sup>22</sup> bilateral ceasefire agreements between non-state armed groups and the military junta as of July 2013 (McArthur 2013, personal interview<sup>23</sup>). However, in the absence of any concrete steps towards a genuine political dialogue or any sign that the military-backed government will negotiate the possibility of restoring federal autonomy and peace to these ethnic areas continues to remain unclear. The challenge is to transform these bilateral ceasefire agreements between the government armed ethnic groups into a national-political dialogue, to national peace process, incorporating justice issues and security sector reform. A national peace process still does not exist at the time of this research, but the Union-level peace team, chaired by President Thein Sein has set the three-phase peace plan as followed (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2012):

1. State level: Ceasefire, set up liaison offices and travel without holding arms to each other's territory.

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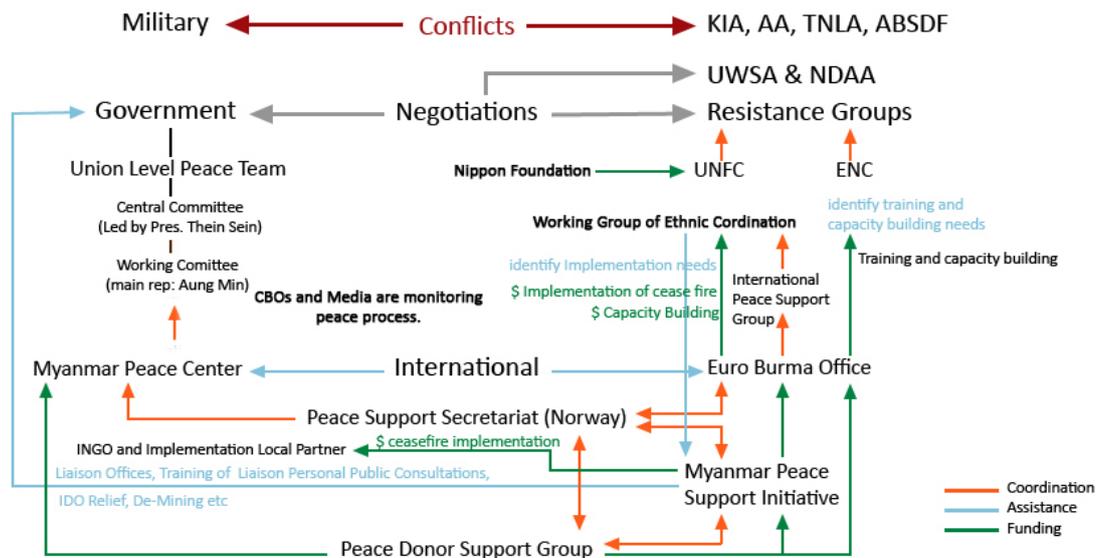
<sup>22</sup> Comprehensive Union Peace and Ceasefire Agreement, 8 April 2013, *available at* <http://www.mmpacemonitor.org/images/pdf/comprehensive-union-peace-ceasefire-agreement.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Personal interview with McArthur, D., Thai Border Consortium Emergency Response Director, Bangkok, 31 July 2013.

2. Union level: Confidence building, holding political dialogue, implement regional development tasks in terms of education, health and communication.
3. Sign agreement for eternal peace in the presence of the parliament represented by nationalities, political parties and different walks of life.

### Peace Process Overview

Figure 4.1



(Source: Myanmar Peace Monitor; see appendix II)

Efforts to turn the ceasefires into a sustainable peaceful settlement are fraught with complications. Although there has been an increase in the number of ceasefire agreements, there has also been an increase in militarization as the government is reinforcing troops [inset where in the country this is happening, i.e. the location]. The troops stopped looking for insurgence or the rebel-sympathizers, which allows for more freedom of movement for civilians. There has also been an improvement in short-term food security, but the long-term food security is uncertain as the troops are still occupying the contested area in order to mount counter-insurgency since guerrilla groups rely on civilians for supplies, manpower, information, and funding. Government forces are aiming to cut ties between non-state armed groups and civilians. The government doesn't supply to the army so the army pillage the villages (McArthur 2013, personal interview<sup>24</sup>). During the ceasefire period, the troops are staying at the barracks but do not do patrols these days. However, there has been a significant decrease in attacks on civilians and open-exchange of hostilities

<sup>24</sup> Personal interview with McArthur, D., Thai Border Consortium Emergency Reponse Director, Bangkok, 31 July 2013.

## 4.4 Forced Migrants as Threats to Peacebuilding

The hegemonic approach risks not only missing an opportunity to resolve protracted refugee situations, but also excludes a range of factors that could potentially threaten current peace-building efforts. Forced migrants communities abroad, especially in neighboring states, may foster elements that challenge the regional peace, especially when underlying tensions are still not addressed and reconciliation has not been fully accomplished. Moreover, displaced populations may become partial, as explained below, to a campaign of destabilization. If this is the case, it would be problematic to view refugees as passive entities in neighboring countries, awaiting the opportunity to return. Instead, there are many instances where large and protracted refugee situations, left unaddressed, have developed the potential to spoil the consolidation of a peace process (Milner, 2008:5). Steve Stedman and Fred Tanner (as cited in Betts and Loescher 2010:17) identify the way in which forced migrants, and ad hoc forced migrant regimes, have been manipulated as resources of war by both states and non-state actors, where the forced migrants have been used instrumentally in conflicts by great powers and by groups in exile in manners that consequently have posed significant risks to international security. One example of the forced migrant population hindering peace processes was witnessed during the planned ceasefire negotiations of the Karen National Union, an ethnic political organization that also has an armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army, with the junta in 1994. The ceasefire talk was actively discouraged by the government-in-exile because they saw it as spoiling their own efforts to affect decisive international action against the Burmese generals (McConnachie 2012:41). The displaced population can prolong the conflict by holding onto uncompromising rhetoric: “Unfortunately for Burma, and the especially civilian populations of conflict zones, the voices of exiled elites have often drowned out better-informed, more nuanced and constructive views. In the zero-sum struggle for resources and perceived legitimacy, genuine ‘peace-making’ efforts have been sacrificed for political expediency” (South 2008: 110).

In post-conflict situations, if forced migrants are not provided with adequate protection and durable solutions, they may become a barrier to the development of peace-building initiatives (Milner; Morris and Stedman, as cited in Betts and Loescher 2010:17). They may, moreover, undermine post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building process as returnees may have property and rights-based claims. In addition to conflict-related displacement, currently there are development-related displacements in Burma over the ownership of natural resources (McArthur 2013, personal interview<sup>25</sup>). Further to post-conflict recovery, Burma has a double burden of facing economic transformation. Furthermore, peace initiatives can be jeopardized by remaining non-state armed groups in exile; by the impartiality to national peace negotiations; by postponing possibilities for repatriation,; or by declining to cooperate and surrender violence (Betts and Loescher 2010:17).

The emergence of diaspora groups and a range of transnational networks, of which forced migrants are a part, may also challenge the state system and interstate relations (Betts and Loescher 2010:10). The displaced population as a result of conflict undertakes the role of transnational actors in their own right through processes of remittance transfer

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<sup>25</sup> Personal interview with McArthur, D., Thai Border Consortium Emergency Reponse Director, Bangkok, 31 July 2013.

and through maintaining identity-based networks across borders (Lindley; Van Hear, as cited in Betts and Loescher 2010:18; Egreteau 2012:129). For the United States Department of Defense, transnationalism means terrorists, insurgents, opposing regimes in civil wars conducting operations outside the territorial boundaries of their home countries, and members of criminal groups (Secretary of Defense, as cited in Vertovec 1999:4). As in any conflict situations, there are actors who function as ‘peace spoilers,’ those who benefit from lucrative economic opportunities a conflict situation may provide and therefore have vested interests in maintaining conflict (Baser and Swain 2008:9; Brees 2009:30). The spoilers are therefore understood as “groups and tactics that actively seek to hinder, delay, or undermine conflict settlement” (Newman and Richmond, as cited in Milner 2008:16). Over the years of conflict in Burma, insurgency has become a way of life for villagers, for combatants on all sides and for the networks of dealers, traders, loggers, spies and aid workers that resulted from the prolonged situation. These illegal transnational activities function through a wide array of actors such as local junta and rebel leaders, Thai or Burmese businessmen and police and immigration officers, with forced migrants sometimes performing high-risk, low-profit manual labor on their behalf (Brees 2009:30; Hyndman 2002:42). The forced migrant movements are therefore associated with more negative aspects of transnational transactions such as organized crime and the demand for trafficking and smuggling networks (Betts and Loescher 2010:18).

Furthermore, refugee camps and protracted refugee situations can serve as a potential breeding ground for radicalization and terrorism. Refugee camps are used as a base for guerrilla, insurgent or terrorist activities (Milner 2008:13; McConnachie 2012:40-41). Non-state armed groups hide behind the humanitarian nature of refugee camps and settlements, and use these camps as an opportunity to recruit among the displaced populations. With limited prospects for education, livelihood opportunities, or freedom of movement, young people in protracted refugee situations may represent a pool of potential recruits for terrorists (Betts and Loescher 2010:16) as seen in the cases of ‘refugee warriors.’ Zolberg et al. (as cited in McConnachie 2012:36) described ‘refugee warrior’<sup>26</sup> groups as ‘not merely a passive group of dependent refugees’ but as “highly conscious refugee communities with a political leadership structure and armed sections engaged in warfare for a political objective, be it to recapture the homeland, change the regime or secure a separate state.” Presently, the direct threats faced by the host-state, posed by the regional spill-over effect of conflict and the presence of ‘refugee warriors’, represent the most significant tie connecting forced migrants and conflict (Milner, 2008:12).

A similar situation can occur in urban settings, outside the refugee camps, as well, where gangs and criminal networks can emerge amongst disenfranchised forced migrant populations (Milner 2008:13). In both urban and refugee camp settings, forced migrant movements have concealed illicit activities, ranging from prostitution and people smuggling to the trade in arms, gems, narcotics and timber, as witnessed in the case of Burmese population in Thailand (Hyndman 2002:42; Loescher and Milner, as cited in Milner 2008:13). The security threats of such transnational activities pose to host states, to the region and involved actors are palpable. They can incite trans-border attacks on both host

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<sup>26</sup> The Karen, an ethnic minority from Burma, has been considered ‘refugee warriors’ by different authors (Adelman; Nyers, as cited in McConnachie 2012: 36)

states and countries of origin, attacks on humanitarian personnel, refugees and civilian populations.

At the root of such security concerns is the failure of international solidarity and burden sharing with host countries. Local and national grievances, and consequential hostility, are intensely amplified when forced migrants have to compete with local populations for resources, jobs and social security services, including health care, education and housing. It is not uncommon to see forced migrants assigned the role of scapegoats for crimes and other socially objectionable situations and order in both rural and urban refugee populated areas (Milner, 2008:14). With no proper mandate or policies to deal with the forced migrant populations, many host governments now regard the populations as security threats. In this way, such governments can justify their acts of hostility, that are violations of human rights, which would not otherwise be acceptable, especially when the state is confronted with the pressures of externally-imposed democratization and economic liberalization policies (Milner 2008:15).

The forced migrants are not only a product of insecurity and conflict but may also act as the catalysts to prolonging insecurity and conflict. Milner (2008:8) blames protracted refugee situations are due to a lack of dialogue from a range of peace and security actors to address the conflict or human rights violations in the home country, and insufficient or non-existing donor government involvement with the country of asylum. Forced migrants can have either negative or positive effects on peace processes and politics in the home state. They can function as unaccountable and irresponsible “long-distance nationalists,”(Anderson, as cited in Spear 2006:5) or fund conflicts in their home countries (Byman et al., as cited in Spear 2006:5) as historical evidences have shown. It is also common for them to perpetuate the conflict, against the desire of those remaining in the country to compromise and end the conflict. Conversely, the forced migrants can contribute to the peace processes in their home country because of their unique position of having connections to both their host and original countries. The forced migrants should therefore exist in a broader political context where they might have positive attributes such as the assertion of agency and political identity (McConnachie 2012:36).

## **4.5 Conclusion**

Although Thailand has provided sanctuary for many forced migrants from Burma, the situation is far from rosy, as many are facing problems as ‘illegal migrants’ outside the refugee camp settings. The host countries must acknowledge forced migrant populations as simultaneously a burden and a resource (Jacobsen, as cited in McConnachie 2012:47). Other stakeholders, such as international NGOs, should recognize this duality as well, as the resources embodied in refugees signify ample potential, both for legitimate state-building, and for the purposes of leaders’ personal enrichment or empowerment.

The current peacebuilding process in Burma only mentions forced migrants abroad in the context of their return once the peace has established. Scholars tend to focus primarily on potential threats from conflict-generated migrant population, rather than on how they contribute to peace processes in their homelands. Transformation in existing paradigm is needed to allow the forced migrants to be made the focal object of peacebuilding and to critically examine the way in which state-centric notions of security can undermine the

security of individual forced migrants (Edwards and Ferstman; Poku and Graham, as cited in Betts and Loescher 2010:15) Inclusive peacebuilding approaches that address the concerns of human vulnerability and international security concurrently are needed as conflicts have a “spill over” effect on the neighboring regions and international community. Given that this is a protracted forced migration situation, Burmese forced migrants have been able to form networks within Thailand and also abroad. It is therefore necessary to explore how the millions of forced migrants may help to facilitate peace making and peace building to not only addresses some of the needs of refugees, but also to develop more effective policy and practices.

# Chapter 5 Alternative Explanation, Alternative Solutions

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the transnational impact the forced migrants have on Burmese peace processes through economic, political and sociocultural aspects. First section will discuss the statics of remittances sent to Burma, and discuss their implications and effect on Burmese society as well as trans-border activities. The second and third sections discuss the political aspects of Burmese activity, which perhaps best demonstrates the direct effect the diaspora community has on peacebuilding; it'll cover the ceasefire talks which were unusually held outside of the country's territory (in Thailand), the civil society organization network with other NGOs, and how their strategic location along the border/outside of Burma gives them a unique advantage that would not have occurred had they been based in Yangon, the former capital of Burma. The fourth section talks about the sociocultural aspects, in terms of the forced migrants' increased qualification through various education and training they receive while being in Thailand. The empirical data from the case of ALTSEAN-Burma's "No Peace Without You" would be discussed in the fifth and final section, which was built upon this argument of forced migrants' transnational impact in the peace process.

## 5.2 Economic influence

Forced migrants can be transnational in many different ways. They are most frequently involved in economic transnationalism at a household level by sending remittances to their countries of origin. Remittances are argued to be the major flow of economic resources from the developed to the developing countries, sometimes surpassing aid monies and potentially being much better concentrated and effective (Spear, 2006:2). The World Bank (2013b) has estimated the sum of personal transfers<sup>27</sup> and compensation of employees<sup>28</sup> to Burma between the years 2008 to 2011 as shown in the table below:

Table 5.1

	2008	2009	2010	2011
Remittances	54,755,020	54,472,032	114,854,849	127,075,981
ODA	534,430,000	355,830,000	355,080,000	376,110,000
GDP	31,400,000,000	35,200,000,000	45,400,000,000	51,400,000,000

Data in current U.S. dollars (Source: World Bank n.d.)

Although Burma's total Official Development Aid (ODA) amount is more than the total remittance amount, the data shows that the remittance flow is growing at a rapid pace, more than doubling the total of 2008 by 2011, while the total ODA amount showed a de-

<sup>27</sup> All current transfers in cash or in kind made or received by resident households to or from non-resident households. Personal transfers thus include all current transfers between resident and non-resident individuals (World Bank 2013b).

<sup>28</sup> The income of border, seasonal, and other short-term workers who are employed in an economy where they are not resident and of residents employed by non-resident entities (World Bank 2013b).

crease of 30% during the same period. It shows that remittances have grown from the amount equivalent to 10% of the ODA in 2008, to 34% of the ODA in 2011.

Migrants, more over can set up more focused development projects in their home community or support local initiatives financially with their collective remittance (Guarnizo, as cited in Brees 2009:30). Once relatively stable livelihoods are established, many Burmese forced migrants tend to remit their money back home (Ying 2013, Personal Interview<sup>29</sup>; Karin-Burmese forced migrants 2013, Personal Interview<sup>30</sup>; Padi 2013, Personal Interview<sup>31</sup>; Mo Hawm et al, Personal Interview<sup>32</sup>; Brees, as cited in Brees 2009:30). The remittances provide the recipients a greater level of power and choice in comparison to aid money (Horst, as cited in Brees 2009:29). The recipients can simply use the money to survive and spend it on immediate consumption or invest it in businesses. These remittance flows can be followed by a rise in foreign exchange in the country through foreign direct investment, for example, and as such, international financial institutions could consider the country to be creditworthy (Fagen and Bump, as cited in Brees 2009:29). This initiating moves of forced migrants can position themselves as the mediator for the non-nationals, “As consumers and business actors, expatriates help map out the potential for business opportunities in the sending [home] country. Furthermore, and to the degree to which expatriates are intermediaries on business transactions they can reduce risk for non-nationals by enforcing transactions” (Lowell et al, as cited in Spear 2006:15-16).

In addition, remittances can help “banking the unbanked” as they improve the recipients’ chance of getting loans and therefore generate a savings culture. Remittances thus play a very important role in poverty reduction. Burmese forced migrants have earned and saved money as migrant workers, expatriate traders, students or cross-border smugglers (insert an example of what is typically smuggled here) and remit a substantial amount back through informal means (Egreteau 2012:135). In Burma’s case at the moment, financial institutions are not very reliable, and sanctions do not allow international financial institutions to engage with Burma. With sanctions against Burma loosening up in recent years following the democratic movement in the country, however, Burma’s economy is going through a transition, opening up the market and attracting more foreign investors. Subscribing to Collier’s Poverty Trap theory, development and conflict are intricately linked phenomena, and are inversely related. According to this view, poverty reduction can contribute to reducing the propensity for conflicts. However, the flow of remittances alone would not automatically lead to development. “The local focus of many of these programs gives them a direct connection to the poor, but the outcome is also dependent on improvement in macro-economic conditions. Poor infrastructure (physical and financial), underdeveloped markets, corruption, and a poor investment climate confine the potential of remittance-focused strategies to the immediate receivers.

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<sup>29</sup> Personal interview with, Ying, a Karin-Burmese forced migrant who has been residing in Thailand for 10 years, Bangkok, 13 May 2013.

<sup>30</sup> See above.

<sup>31</sup> Personal interview with E.Padi, an ALTSEAN-Burma Training Officer on ALTSEAN-Burma, Bangkok, 11 July 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview with Ying Mo Hawm and Wint War Khaing, the former ALTSEAN-Burma interns who have worked on “No Peace Without You” campaign, Bangkok, 26 July 2013.

Remittances do, however, shelter recipients from the effects of these development inhibitors nonetheless – at least in the short term” (Newland, as cited in Spear 2006:14). The actual impact of remittances in Burma’s development and peace processes should be considered inconclusive, as the studies of how remittances are spent are still rare, as well as a consensus on how to best evaluate their local impact (Egreteau 2012:135-136).

### 5.3 Political Transnationalism and ceasefire talks

*“Just because they are not in the country, their voice shouldn’t be disenfranchised. They need to make sure they are not mistrusted again. They need confidence-building for the sustainable peace” (McArthur 2013, Personal Interview).*

There have been scholarship discussions over ‘conflict-generated diasporas’ (Lyons, as cited in Spear 2006:2) and their increasing tendency to engage with political changes and democratization in, for example, their countries of origin (Schimitz, Shain, and Koinova as cited in Egreteau 2012:129). This population of forced migrants is a largely untouched source of expertise and knowledge that have the potential to contribute to post-conflict peace processes (Lyons, as cited in Spear 2006:2). Their transnational political activism usually intends to publicize the cause of an exile community, collect funds worldwide to lobby, formulating policies that can pressure their home government and initiate political change (Egreteau 2012:129).

Acknowledging the influence of political transnationalism, TBC provides support to two groups: first, to civilian society groups with extensive networks in Burma, based along the borders, which function as contact-points; second, to non-state armed groups. TBC have supported non-state armed groups to facilitate consultations with constituents and information flows among stakeholders:

*“For us, one of the things we make sure is that the armed groups have some legitimacy. They are not just saying what they want from their own narrow perspective, that they are consulting with civilians and villages and the areas of their administration and reflecting that in their negotiations with governments, so we support a number of those consultations” (McArthur 2013, Personal interview<sup>33</sup>).*

What sets the Burma/Thailand’s case apart from other peace processes is perhaps best marked by its ceasefire talks being held outside of the country of conflict (Burma)<sup>34</sup>. Most of the meetings have not been in Burma<sup>35</sup>, the military government usually demands peace talks inside, but in case of Burma, they have been held outside, with many combatants coming-and-going across its porous border, “so they can debate the issues without fear of being arrested” (McArthur 2013, Personal Interview) between the government and the non-state armed groups, and between the non-state armed groups and the civil peace groups. TBC have provided logistics for these peace talks, supporting lo-

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<sup>33</sup> Personal interview with McArthur, D., Thai Border Consortium Emergency Response Director, Bangkok, 31 July 2013.

<sup>34</sup> As of October 2013, the latest ceasefire talk between The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), comprising eight non-state armed groups and Minister Aung Min was held in Chaing Mai, Thailand.

<sup>35</sup> They have been held mostly in Thailand, and sometimes in China and India.

gistical costs of initiatives of non-state armed groups, the travel costs of meeting with the government to negotiate, and also provided verification support to facilitate a number of workshops<sup>36</sup> on topics related to independent civilian ceasefire monitoring mechanisms with civil society groups. They also have supported human rights group to go for exposure visits to learn about ceasefire monitoring mechanism, to see what is relevant to individual situations.

One of the challenges Burmese transnational political activism faces is the severely polarized politics, haunting even in exile, oftentimes coinciding with ethnic tensions. With its divisive ethnic activism that prioritizes interests of individual ethnic groups, rather than a cohesive interest of ‘pan-Burmese solidarity,’ (Egreteau 2012:134) the polarization has considerably hampered collective actions weakening their collective power (Padi 2013, Personal Interview; Egreteau 2012:132). TBC therefore encourages dialogues between different ethnic groups to form a basis for a holistic approach to sustainable peace:

*“We also facilitated a number of meetings for civil society groups from different ethnic groups so they can come together and reflect about what is going on in different peace processes because there are number of peace processes, it’s just not one peace process. We bring sometimes justice civil society groups alone and/or with non-state armed groups together” (McArthur 2013, Personal Interview).*

### **5.3.1 Civil Society Support**

Burma can provide a particularly pertinent site for analysis of the constructive capacities of non-state armed groups, particularly in the border territories, as non-state actors frequently provide services and resources that the state fails to deliver, including food aid, clothes, education, health care and village protection (Grundy-Warr and Dean, Joliffe, Dudley, South et al., as cited in McConnachie 2012:33; Egreteau 2012:131; Brees 2009:30). Additionally, training courses of a wide array of subjects are provided for interested and connected individuals (Brees 2009:31). Inside Burma, the civil society groups can do consultation, campaigning in the villages, and outside, in Thailand they can get inputs from other activists who have organized information from other areas and lobby to the international community, taking a very reflexive approach (Mo Hawm 2013, Personal Interview; Padi 2013, Personal Interview; McArthur 2013, Personal Interview). It has been argued that fleeing Burma is the safest way to conduct political activities, to reveal the human rights violations inside the country and engage in some kind of opposition, as there is no freedom of speech or political organisation inside Burma,

*“Most organizations collect information about human rights violations [in Burma] but they have an office in Thailand; it’s easier to channel the information to the media, so the border-based organizations work very effectively. There is more access to information in Thailand, too” (Padi 2013, Personal Interview).*

*“In their new homeland, they may have access to a wider variety of information sources, such as those provided by social and employment contacts, media reporting and Internet communications.” (Purdy, as cited in Spear 2006:6).* With a lack of both the international

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<sup>36</sup> Recently (as of July 2013), three workshops on conflict transformation was held over a period of 5 days, covering topics of conflict analysis, negotiations and conflict transformation strategy (McArthur 2013, Personal interview).

networks and the capacity their Thai-based counterparts have, Burma-based organizations are less present on the international scene, which can lead to less recognition by their population (Brees 2009:32). Taking advantage of their unique position of possessing the dual-identity, some Burmese political exiles, for example, high-profile managers<sup>37</sup> of various Burmese media, have decided to channel back and forth between Burma and their place of exile (Egreteau 2012:137).

TBC supports civil society groups' undertakings to feed information into the refugee camps, to hold discussions with the forced migrant committees, to conduct public forums and getting feedbacks, and ultimately delivering inputs from civil society groups, reflecting their perspectives and attitude, into the policy-level dialogues, to make sure that "[the forced migrants] aren't forgotten, and that they are part of this process." As many of their members come from the forced migrant population, civil society groups have a degree of representation to exert influence on policies. Collectively, they are more organized than individual forced migrants, so they can provide a more strategic input into the negotiation process (McArthur 2013, Personal Interview).

## 5.4 Increased Human Capital and its Sociocultural Implications

*"Refugees return with schooling and new skills, in itself a critical factor in any post-conflict situation. Over and over, we see that their participation is necessary for the consolidation of both peace and post-conflict economic recovery"- Statement by Mr. António Guterres, UNHCR, to the UNSC, New York, 24 January 2006*

Forced migrant contributions may develop from relevant competences and skills that they have gained in exile that may directly contribute to post-conflict reconstruction process, from the direct involvement of forced migrants in the negotiation of the peace agreement, and through peace education and reconciliation activities that can occur prior to repatriation (Sinatti et al, 2010: 40; Milner 2008:19-20). The state of education system in Burma remains abysmal. Many Burmese forced migrants in Thailand have received relatively high standards of education and training compared to those in Burma, for instance, getting basic schooling including English in refugee camps. They can be trained with a range of skills and qualifications that could help address specific gaps in the provision of basic services in their country of origin, especially relating to health and education (Milner 2011:2), and some have been employed by civil society organizations and/or international aid agencies (Mo Hawm *et al.* 2013, Personal Interview; ALTSEAN, n.d). The latter implies a particular significance for rebuilding post-conflict Burma, as they have the capacity to write project proposals and attract donors (Brees 2009:31). The newly acquired skills in community management and service delivery of assistance programs (TBC, n.d.) will be indubitably beneficial towards development (Egreteau 2012:137), and reconstruction of the state.

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<sup>37</sup> Mizzima, The Irrawaddy, Democratic (Egreteau 2012:137).

Opportunities such as language training, vocational training, professional development, peace education (Mo Hawm *et al* 2013, Personal Interview) and other activities could all form part of a holistic approach, and contribute both to peacebuilding and the self-reliance of forced migrant population (Milner 2008:20):

*“First, [forced migrants] must know peacebuilding process. If they don't know, how can they be involved? The first thing is we will explain more about peace to them, [as] some of migrant workers do not know” (Khaing 2013, Personal Interview).*

Peace education programmes for forced migrants could augment prospects of reconciliation and conflict resolution upon return, while the inclusion of refugees in peace processes would boost the legitimacy of these undertakings and help ensure that such initiatives are more representative of the broad spectrum of war-affected populations (Milner 2011:2).

## 5.5 Case Study: ‘No Peace Without You’ Campaign

The ‘No Peace Without You’ campaign was a project of ALTSEAN-Burma internship program, comprised of six women from different ethnic groups and organizations<sup>38</sup>, over the course of nine weeks from 8 October to 9 December 2012. The interns chose to work with the migrant workers since they “understand the needs of the migrant workers,” as they themselves are also migrant workers living in another country (Mo Hawm *et al.* 2013, Personal Interview).

The campaign’s goal was to encourage the Burmese migrant workers’ interest and participation in the peace process back home. Arguably, the biggest concern of the Burmese migrant workers is their work for survival. Just a small portion of them has an interest in politics, with limited opportunity for direct participation. When asked the question of their affordability to participate in the peace processes in their current fraught situation, the interns responded:

*“Peacebuilding in Burma is not a distant issue. People are living in fear [in] almost every ethnic areas in Burma, so that is why there are more and more people fleeing to Thailand and becoming migrant workers. They have plans for go[ing] back [to] their home and for their livelihood problems they may face in Thailand, like they do not have their own land, no home, no fair [representation] for them in some work places. Sure, they can afford to be involved in peacebuilding process because they are part of people from Burma. If [there is] no worker in Burma, there is no develop[ment in] country.”*

The advocacy campaign had a specific objective to raise awareness and subsequent interest amongst 200 Burmese migrant workers in Bangkok about conflict in ethnic minority regions in Burma and inform about the current reforms in the country, as well as learning more about the Burmese migrant worker population in Thailand. The main aim was to have migrant workers more interested and become more active in political discussions,

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<sup>38</sup> Burmese Women Union (BWU), Pa-Oh Youth Organization (PYO), Shan Youth Power (SYP), Kachin Women Association Thailand (KWAT) based in Chiang Mai, Kayan Women Organization (KyWO) based in Mae Sot, Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP) based in Sangkhburi, Thailand.

sharing information with other people from Burma, with their families and friends, influencing bigger communities as well.

The campaign first focused on the lack of representation of the migrant workers in the current reform process. Even though the migrant workers are working abroad, they are subject to Burmese government’s taxation. Over the course of the recent reforms in Burma, however, the government has not taken Burmese forced migrants into account. The government is opening its economy, but currently there are no labor rights and a deficit of qualified workers. As mentioned in the previous section, the forced migrants can contribute to the country’s economic development with their newly obtained expertise. The campaign also aimed to inform people of ethnic conflicts in Burma, as there is a deficit of information and independent mainstream media to disseminate the news of what is happening in Burma.

Figure 5.1



The campaign poster (source: [ALTSEAN-Burma Interns](http://ALTSEAN-Burma.org))

Interns visited two migrant worker centers in Bangkok and officially launched the campaign on 18 November 2012. Interns collaborated with Thai Action Community for Democracy in Burma and Pa-Oh Labor Union based in Bangkok for the campaign launch. They have migrant centers in Bangkok, which provide education for migrant workers and distribute newsletters and magazines about migrant workers issues. Interns also had a network with other organizations such as Burmese Women Union, based in Chiang Mai, MAP foundation, based in Mae Sot, Rehmonnya Labor Union, based in Sumtskhon (Maharchai), Thailand, which helped to distribute information to migrant workers and other organizations. The interns gave a presentation in four migrant workers centers in Thailand, in Mae La Oo refugee camp in Mae Sot, Thailand and in IDP camps in Kachin State in Burma and distributed 1000 posters with the slogan “No Peace without You” and some flyers, as well as conducting an online campaign, communicating mainly through

its social media (Facebook) group<sup>39</sup>. As of October 2013, the Facebook page is still active, periodically updated with pictures, videos and articles about Burma's ethnic conflicts, with various participants interacting in Burmese, English and other ethnic languages. The Facebook activism is particularly significant in Burma's case, as it has bypassed the incumbent government's strict censorship, unlike the mainstream media, which is not really independent (Padi 2013, Personal Interview). It is also an easier medium for communication for migrant workers than e-mails (Padi 2013, Personal Interview), as the government has been training to intercept e-mails and detect their sources (Irrawaddy as cited in Brees 2009:37).

During the follow-up phase in January 2013, it was estimated that there were over 600 migrant workers participating in these campaigns, 150 migrant workers from the following places: Sumtskhon (Maharchai), Thailand, Mae La Oo refugee camp in Mae Sot, Thailand, Mae Sot, Thailand, Chiang Mai, Thailand, as well as reaching out to 150 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kachin State, Burma, far surpassing the initial goal of 350. Various indicators were used to measure the success of the campaign: the feedbacks, comments and questions during the presentations and meetings, and Facebook statistics. The following questions raised by the participants and the media show that they were intrigued by the campaign, reflecting their interest in the political discussions:

1. How can local people participate in the peace project?
2. What is the meaning of peace? How do you think?
3. Who is responsible for peace?
4. Which organization is doing this campaign?
5. If we have some problems, whom can we contact? How?
6. What role do we play in the peace process? How?
7. What is the meaning of tax?
8. Why do we have to pay the tax to the government?
9. What does the ALTSEAN- Burma stand for?
10. Which education-level does one have to have to participate in the peace process?
11. Are the ethnic minority groups involved in armed struggles because of peace?
12. How can government attend migrant workers issues when there are internal conflicts?
13. What is the objective for doing this 'No Peace Without You' campaign?

Objectives	Outcomes	Means of verification
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<sup>39</sup> <http://facebook.com/altseaninterns25>

<p>To raise awareness amongst 350 migrant workers from Burma in Bangkok and Sumtskhon (Maharchai), Thailand about conflict in ethnic areas in Burma and about the current reforms by the end of November.</p>	<p>-Reached 750 migrant worker in three migrant centers.          -Two distribution events organized in Ranong and Phang Nga reaching(20 posters) migrant workers in Ranong and(130 posters) migrant workers in Phang Nga by the end of November and the beginning of December.</p>	<p>-Photos          -Activity reports</p>
<p>Get migrant workers more interested in the ethnic conflicts &amp; peace process, current reforms (including economic) in Burma.</p>	<p>-During the campaign launch in Bangkok area and Samut Skhon (Marharchai), migrant workers asked questions, gave comments and/or share their experiences. Other participants, monks for example, asked questions and comments as well.          -On Facebook: There were (75) likes, (2) comments and (25) shared the facebook page between the period of 18 November to 4 December.          -One interview request was made by media Independence Mon News Agency (IMNA) on 19 of November (Available at <a href="http://monnews.org/">http://monnews.org/</a>).</p>	<p>-Migrant workers asked questions curiously          -Responses through Facebook          -Interview          -Distribution of posters.</p>

Additionally, the project also contributed to the improved qualifications of the interns who are forced migrants themselves; they acquired proposal, press release writing skills, and learned to launch campaigns, to translate the press release skill and write reports. Interns also got a chance to hone their public speaking and presentation skills to present the campaign in front of many people, being ready to answer spontaneous questions raised by the migrant workers and other participants. Some of the interns did not have these skills and knowledge prior to the program.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The sharp increase of transnationalism destabilizes the pre-existing rules of sovereignty based on territoriality. The idea of the person who belongs to just one state or at most migrates from one state to just one other, whether temporarily or permanently, is undermined by the increase in mobility; growth of temporary, cyclical and recurring migrations; cheap and easy travel, etc. In the context of globalisation, transnationalism can extend previous face-to-face communities based on kinship, neighbourhoods or workplaces into remote virtual communities, which communicate at a distance faster and more efficiently than ever (Guarnizo 2003:1218). In other words, it would not be too impetuous to argue that transnational communities' influence can be potentially.

Recognizing the impact the forced migrants can have, ALTSEAN-Burma interns launched 'No Peace Without You' campaign to raise awareness amongst the population. As argued by Robin Cohen, "Awareness of their precarious situation may also propel members of diasporas to advance legal and civic causes and to be active in human rights and social justice issues" (as cited in Vertovec 1999:11) unbounded.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

The research was spawned from a simple pondering of diaspora's influence in the affairs of the country of their origin. With my interest in refugee situations and peace processes, it then led to what became the main question: What kind of role do forced migrants play in establishing peace? The specific case of Burmese forced migrants in Thailand was chosen because although it is a protracted situation, Burma has been going through recent political and economic transformation, which can lead to a significant change in near future. To answer the research question, my project explored the current predicaments of the Burmese forced migrants, identifying the challenges and the untapped opportunities, based on the primary data collected from interviews with various forced migrants and NGOs that work with them in Bangkok.

The dominant depiction of forced migrants has been that either they are vulnerable, and their return function as the pinnacle of a successful peacebuilding process, or they can act as hindering forces to peace process, as seen in the flagrant cases of "refugee warriors." Migrants have been described as a risk due to their ability to sustain and transnationalize conflicts by potentially providing material and political support to conflicting parties; additionally, they may also carry attitudes of conflict with them and reproduce them within the new community (Sinatti et al, 2010:6). In post-conflict situations, if forced migrants are not offered adequate protection and durable solutions, they may become a threat to the development of peace processes. They may disturb post-conflict reform and peacebuilding as "returnees with property and rights-based claims, through remaining militarized groups in exile, by remaining outside of peace negotiations, or refusing to renounce violence" (Betts and Loescher 2010:17).

The research is based on the chasm in this hegemonic paradigm, as forced migrants both inside the country and abroad are surely important stakeholders on the road to peacebuilding and the extensive negotiations this entails. They can contribute constructively to peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts in various ways as valuable interlocutors, by engaging in initiatives that either indirectly contribute to economic and sociocultural advancement or directly promote political dialogue processes, thus establishing the foundation for sustainable peace. Through transnational networks, forced migrants can exert influence over the politics of their home country, with activities ranging from advocacy and lobbying in the country of residence, to the initiation of dialogue processes, to projects in the area of relief, development and reconstruction (Sinatti et al, 2010:6), as well as defining voting behaviour, and introducing a focus on asylum, immigration, and transnationalism to the domestic political process. Forced migrants can also make financial contributions to the development process back home by sending remittances. They may also improve their qualifications through professional training and education, as well as acquiring a unique set of relations and knowledge on cultural practices, demands and current developments that stem from their familiarity with both their home and their new countries. The forced migrants thus act on a global scale and have influence on events well beyond one territory, ranging from economic development to conflict duration; the presence of forced migrants abroad cannot be treated as an "isolated factor, addressed at the end of the peacebuilding process" (Loesher et al. as cited in Snyder 2011:2). Some NGOs that work with the forced migrants have recognized this potential of forced mi-

grants and encourage their participation by providing advocacy support, training, as well as responding to their immediate livelihood issues. As the country of origin and the host country influence the transnational activities, the impact of transnationalism may change quickly once the technological, political and conflict context alters, such as in terms of the forced migrants' participation in transnational dialogues, the impact of remittances on the overall economy (and subsequent development), the involvement in peace talks, etc. Furthermore, other transformations, such as knowledge of the human rights discourse, may only change people's hearts and minds slowly and in an immeasurable way.

It is not my intention to paint forced migrants with a generalized predilection. Forced migrants are not a homogenous population, containing groups of different classes, genders, religions and ethnicities. It cannot be assumed that a given population can be treated as a single uniformed group (Spear 2006:4). There is no guarantee that the polymorphous population will play a positive role. After all, the same disagreements over ethnic, communal, and religious issues afflict both the Burmese population back home and the forced migrant populations abroad (Egreteau 2012: 132). What is clear, however, is the significant potential that these communities have to influence both peacebuilding and conflict via their capacities and networks. Therefore, to be fully effective, peacebuilding initiatives must more fully consider and incorporate the political role these forced migrants may have, as well as the regional dynamics of the conflict, when it comes to undermining or supporting the peace process. Furthermore, there is a need to evaluate the specific added value that collaboration with the forced migrant population entails on a case-by-case basis. A forced migrant should not be automatically regarded as an expert and knowledge of the country of origin needs to be complemented with knowledge and skills regarding conflict and peace.

Arendt (as cited in Nyers 2006:17) emphasizes how the plight of forced migrants is ultimately linked to their political precariousness - by being denied access to a political space and meaningful political expression, they are being denied their human rights: "They are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion." As addressed throughout this RP, part of this issue stems from the hegemonic conceptualization of forced migrants as risky objects to be managed by the state, rather than potential partners in the peacebuilding process. Therefore, reconceptualization and imagining discursive alternatives have transformative potential and are an important part of taking a critical approach to the problem - something this research attempts to do (Kabeer, as cited in Snyder 2011:7).

The research reinforces the importance of implementing policy and practice that supports forced migrant population's self-sustainability and organization. The government, NGOs and other agencies involved in forced migrant assistance should stop viewing forced migrants as a 'vulnerable' or 'violent' population to be acted 'on' and instead recognize them as a 'valuable' community to be communicated 'with'. Despite the need for a multifarious approach to protracted forced migrant situations, the overall response of policy makers remains compartmentalized with security, development and humanitarian issues mostly being discussed in different forums, each with their own theoretical frameworks, institutional arrangements, and independent policy approaches (Milner 2008:19). The multifaceted engagement of peace and security and development communities in what

has been exclusively a humanitarian issue will increase the potential of forced migration populations.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Semi-structured interview questionnaires.

Forced migrant

### I. PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name:

Sex:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Marital status:

Religion:

Number of household/members:

Length of stay in Bangkok/Thailand:

Living arrangement in Bangkok:

Visa/Residency Status:

Profession:

Education level:

### II. IN-DEPTH QUESTIONS

1. What was the reason you left Burma?
2. How did you come to Thailand?
3. Why did you come to Thailand?
4. Did you know anyone in Thailand before arrival?
5. Do you still have family in Burma? If so, do you stay in touch with your family in Burma? How?
6. Do you visit Burma? If so, how often do you visit?
7. Do you send money back to Burma? If so, through what means?
8. What are some challenges you face?
9. Do you follow the current affairs in Burma? If so, through what means do you obtain news?
10. Have you ever been active in any Burmese community groups in Bangkok or Thailand? What was the reason behind in your (not) participating?
11. Have you ever been politically active in Burma? If so, did that contribute to your reason for leaving?
12. What is your plan for the future? Is returning to Burma in your future?

## **NGO Personnel**

### **I. General**

1. What is the organization's main function?
2. Who is your target group?
3. How many Burmese forced migrants are you currently working with?
4. Do they have mostly foreign/Thai/Burmese staff?
5. How is the relationship between the organization and the authorities(Burmese/Thai)?
6. What was the motivation behind the organization's establishment? (religious? Ethnic?)

### **II. 'No Peace Without You' Campaign**

1. The date of the campaign
2. The interns' background information-their work experience, life background, etc.
3. Target group: why work with the migrant workers specifically?
4. With the livelihood challenges they face, could they afford to be involved in the peace process back home?
5. How was the campaign designed and implemented?
6. What was the outcome of the campaign?
7. How did you measure the outcome of the campaign?
8. Any follow-up plans with the campaign?

## Appendix II

UNFC United Nationalities Federal Council (Source: [Myanmar Peace Monitor](#))

Ceasefire	Non-Ceasefire
<b>KNU</b> Karen National Union <b>KNPP</b> Karrenni National Progress Party <b>SSPP/SSA-N</b> Shan State Army-North <b>CNF</b> Chin National Front <b>NMSP</b> New Mon State Party <b>PNLK</b> PaO National Liberation Organization	<b>KIA</b> Kachin Independence Army <b>NUFA</b> National United Front of Arakan <b>WNO</b> Wa National Organization <b>LDU</b> Lahu Democratic Union <b>PSLF/TNLA</b> Palaung State Liberation Front/ Ta-ang National Liberation Army <b>KNO</b> Kachin National Organisation (merged with KIO)

## Non-UNFC

Following the UNFC's leadership	Unofficially following UNFC principles and plan
ALP Arakan Liberation Party, aka Rakhine State liberation Party (involved in WGEC) DKBA-5 Democratic Karen Buddhist Army- Brigade 5 (follows KNU's political leadership) KPC, KNU/KNLA Peace Council (UNFC unofficial observer) KNLP Kayan New Land Party (UNFC observer of the, under pressure from the govt to transform into a PMF (April 7, 2010) but continues to function as a ceasefire group)	UWSA United Wa State Army NDAA Mongla National democratic Alliance army RCSS/SSA-S Shan State Army-South AA Arakan Army ABSDF All Burma Student's Democratic Fron MTUF Mergui-Tavoy United Front Others NSCN-K National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang (primarily demanding economic and social development for their area)