

Escalating conflict

Since the Burmese government attacked the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in June 2011, breaking a 17-year ceasefire, conflict has spread through Kachin State and northern Shan State, with about 150 Burmese battalions deployed to crush the KIA. Ongoing military reinforcement and offensives belie government claims that they are committed to negotiating peace with ethnic armed groups.

In recent months, the government has tried to seize control of jade-mining areas of Hpakant in western Kachin State, deploying 11 battalions and disguising troops as jade workers. This has triggered fierce fighting with the KIA, causing civilian death and injury, and fresh large-scale displacement since August 2012.

During September 2012, the government has also renewed attempts to seize the KIA headquarters of Laiza on the China-Burma border, targeting it with long-range mortar shells and threatening the lives of thousands of displaced sheltering in the area.

Ongoing atrocities

Since the start of the conflict, KWAT has documented widespread human rights abuses committed by the Burma Army against civilians, including sexual violence, torture, and killing, which likely amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. Burmese troops have committed sexual violence against at least 61 women and children, about half of whom were killed.

Sexual violence has also been committed against men. In an open letter to President Thein Sein, a Kachin woman has appealed for justice for her husband, Lahpai Gam, aged 24, a displaced villager who in June 2012 endured severe torture and sexual abuse by Burmese troops of Infantry Battalion 37. Accused of being KIA soldiers, he and another villager caught going to tend cattle outside Myitkyina, were beaten, cut with knives, hung up by chains, submerged in water, and forced to drink petrol. Taunted for being Christians, they were forced to spread their arms in a crucifix position and kneel on sharp stones. They were also forced to perform homosexual acts in front of the Burmese soldiers. They are currently being held without charge in Myitkyina prison.

Increasing displacement

Escalating offensives and ongoing atrocities by the Burma Army have caused an estimated total of 100,000 villagers to flee from their homes. 58,282 of these are sheltering in Kachin-controlled areas along the Chinese border; the rest are mainly sheltering in towns in government-controlled areas, including about 10,000 newly displaced in the Hpakant area.

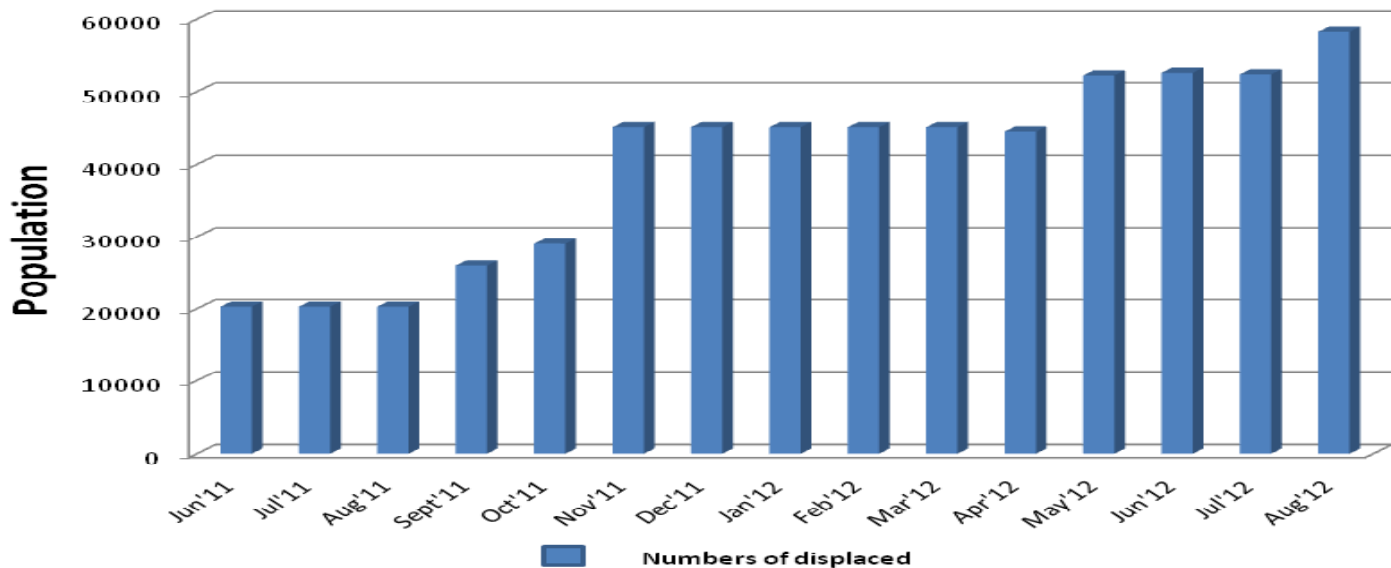
Chinese authorities have not allowed any refugee camps on their soil, and in August 2012, pushed back about 7,000 Kachin refugees who had been sheltering in China.

Little international aid reaching China-Burma border

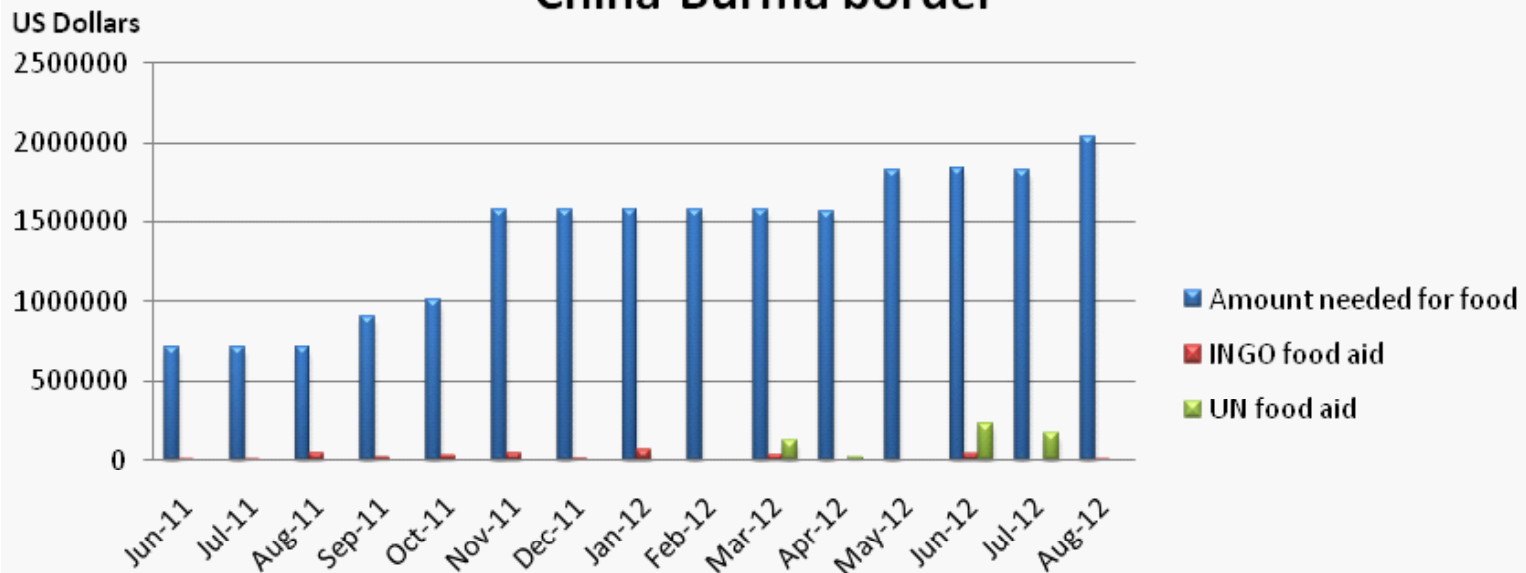
The Burmese government has restricted international aid agencies from accessing displaced populations in Kachin-controlled areas. The UN has only been granted access four times to these border regions. Most UN aid has been provided to the displaced in the government-controlled areas.

According to local relief groups, only 4% of food needs have been provided by international aid groups, including UN, to almost 60,000 people sheltering in China-Burma border areas. Nearly all food and other basic support have been funded by private donations from local or overseas compatriots. This has placed a huge burden on local communities, who have struggled to meet the basic needs of the growing numbers of displaced.

Numbers of displaced on the China-Burma border

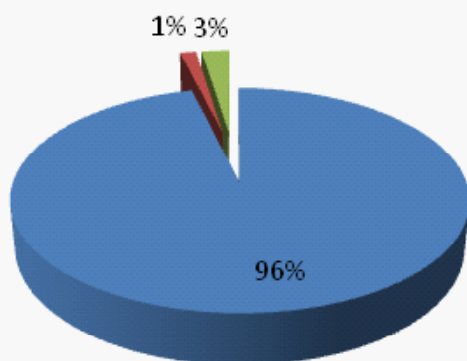


International response to food needs of displaced on China-Burma border



■ INGO food aid as % of total food need (Jun 2011-Aug 2012)

■ UN food aid as % of total food need (Jun 2011-Aug 2012)



Note: The cost of food needed was calculated at 7 Chinese yuan (USD 1.11) per head per day, and then converted to US dollars. Amounts donated by NGOs are the actual donations in dollars. The cost of food given by the UN was estimated based on amounts of food given per head per month.

Recommendations

To the Government of Burma

- To lift all restrictions preventing humanitarian agencies from accessing those displaced by conflict in northern Burma.
- To immediately put an end to the human rights abuses being perpetrated against Kachin civilians.
- To cease military offensives against the Kachin people and other ethnic nationalities and to withdraw troops from the conflict areas
- To conduct meaningful dialogue jointly with all the ethnic opposition, including not only armed groups but also civil society, towards a political settlement which will bring genuine lasting peace throughout the country.

To the United Nations

- To pressure the Burmese and Chinese governments to lift all restrictions preventing humanitarian agencies from accessing and assisting displaced persons along the China-Burma border.
- To condemn the Burmese government's atrocities against the Kachin people as well as against other ethnic nationalities and to call on U Thein Sein's government to put an end to such human rights violations.
- To set up a Commission of Inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity and war crimes taking place in Kachin State and throughout Burma
- UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon should not call for the ending of sanctions on Burma while the Burmese government continues military offensives and human rights abuses in Kachin areas.

To foreign governments

- To immediately provide humanitarian aid to fulfill the basic needs of populations displaced by conflict in northern Burma, including in Kachin-controlled areas along the China-Burma border.
- To condemn the Burmese government's atrocities against the Kachin people as well as against other ethnic nationalities and to call on U Thein Sein's government to put an end to such human rights violations.
- To call for a UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity and war crimes taking place in Kachin State and throughout Burma
- To maintain sanctions until there is a negotiated political settlement to the ethnic conflict in Burma

To the government of China

- To admit and provide humanitarian aid and shelter to refugees fleeing violence in Kachin State and elsewhere in Burma and stop sending refugees back into areas where they may be at risk of human rights abuses.



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