

Aid shortfall affecting IDPs at Myaing Gyi Ngu, says Karen rights group

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By FRONTIER

YANGON — A Karen civil society group has expressed concern about a decline in humanitarian aid for more than 5,000 people enduring difficult living conditions at three makeshift camps in Kayin State's Hpa-an District.

The camps, at a bend in the Thanlwin (Salween) River at Myaing Gyi Ngu, about 70 kilometres north of Hpa-an, have since 2016 housed 5,610 internally displaced persons driven from their homes by conflict.

The plight of the IDPs is the focus of a report released by the Karen Human Rights Group in Yangon on May 22 titled, *'Dreaming of Home, Hoping for Peace: Protracted displacement in Southeast Myanmar'*.

It says the IDPs at Myaing Gyi Ngu lack access to adequate food, clean water, safe sanitary conditions, basic necessities and work opportunities, and some have been injured while foraging for food in landmine-contaminated areas.

Of the IDPs interviewed for the report, 82 percent said landmine contamination was preventing them from returning to their villages, with sporadic armed clashes and continued militarisation cited as other barriers to return.

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"Continuing tensions between armed actors and the push to construct the Hatgyi Dam threaten to impede their return and cause further displacement," the report says.

The KHRG says an aim of the report is to highlight how conflict-related displacement remains a major issue in southeastern Myanmar despite the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement signed by eight ethnic armed groups, including the Karen National Union.

"We must recognise that the peace process has failed to deliver on its promises," said KHRG senior advocacy coordinator, Saw Way Lay.

"The Myanmar government, the Karen National Union and all relevant armed actors must commit to peace and the safe and voluntary return of displaced populations," Way Lay said.

The report calls on the Myanmar government and the KNU to cooperate closely to create the conditions necessary for the IDPs to return home and live peaceful and sustainable lives.

"For decades, conflict-related displacement has been an integral part of life in the region, resulting in countless humanitarian crises. No efforts should be spared to put an end to protracted displacement," it says.

The report says the proposed building of the Hatgyi Dam, one of seven planned on the Thanlwin River, has been a catalyst for violence in the area for years as different armed actors vie for control of the site.

It said fighting has occurred often near the Hatgyi Dam site since the hydropower project was proposed in 1998.

"This has had devastating consequences on local communities, who have fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu to avoid a life of chronic displacement, violence, forced recruitment, forced military labour and other human rights violation," the report said.

"Tensions further intensified in 2015, with frequent clashes occurring between different armed actors and an increase in displacement to Myaing Gyi Ngu," it said.