



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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07 August 2007

### MMR102581.E

Myanmar: Whether the government monitors the activities of its citizens who travel to, or live in, Canada or other countries, especially if those citizens are engaging in political activities abroad in which they criticize the government (2005 - August 2007)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

*Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006* provides the following information regarding freedom of movement in Myanmar [Burma]:

The government carefully scrutinized prospective travel abroad for all passport holders. Rigorous control of passport and exit visa issuance perpetuated rampant corruption, as applicants were forced to pay bribes of up to \$230 (300,000 kyat), the equivalent of a yearly salary. The government regularly denied passports on political grounds.... The government required all foreign and local residents, except diplomats, to apply for authorization to leave the country. (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2d)

The *Travel Information Manual (TIM)*, a publication of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) that is updated monthly, partially corroborates the above in indicating that an exit permit issued by the Immigration Department in Yangon (formerly Rangoon) is required for all airline passengers leaving Myanmar (Aug. 2007, 319).

A program manager with extensive experience with Myanmar issues who works for Inter Pares, a registered Canadian charity that promotes humanitarian assistance and human rights protection (25 Sept. 2006), provided the following information to the Research Directorate during a telephone interview on 27 July 2007. Regarding whether authorities in Myanmar monitor its citizens who travel to other countries, the Program Manager stated that it can vary depending on the identity of the person, on how the person left the country and whether they are politically active. The Program Manager explained that the Myanmar regime has an "extensive" monitoring system, and that people feel watched, even when they are abroad. Citizens who are not politically active and who illegally cross the border could possibly go unnoticed by the authorities, but the movements of citizens who are politically active would likely be monitored by authorities. The Program Manager specified that Myanmar authorities' concept of "politically active" is rather wide-ranging; for example, a health worker could be considered as politically active. The Program Manager also stated that members of the Rohingya ethnic minority in particular are closely monitored by authorities, that they face "persecution" and that there are clear systems in place to keep track of them. She indicated that it is common practice for organizations who work with people from Myanmar to be extremely careful with information exchanged via e-mail or telephone as there are legitimate concerns that the regime is closely monitoring their work.

A projects officer with the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that has general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (UN 12 Feb. 2004; ALRC 13 Nov. 2001) and that monitors human rights cases in Myanmar (ibid. 30 July 2007), provided the following information to the Research Directorate in correspondence dated 30 July 2007:

[The ALRC] is aware, from a number of cases, that the government of Myanmar does certainly monitor the activities of its citizens abroad, particularly those engaged in political activities. However, the extent to which it is able to do so is a matter of conjecture: it is limited in its capacity to monitor by personnel and modern technological resources. Nonetheless, it uses certain techniques, such as requiring citizens to come to the embassies and consulates to pay tax and renew passports, to maintain a presence among persons abroad who have not obtained residency or citizenship in other countries.

The following information was provided to the Research Directorate by a country analyst for Asia at the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in correspondence dated 27 July 2007. The Country Analyst specified that the information provided was her own viewpoint based on her extensive experience covering Myanmar.

The government of Burma is not in a position to monitor the activities of all of its citizens living in other countries as the number of people who have left Burma is huge (there are an estimated 3 million who have fled Burma due to persecution or human rights violations). However, in certain cases the government may monitor the activities of those citizens living overseas who were already engaged in political activities while living in Burma and came onto the government's radar screen then. The likelihood of such people getting permission by authorities to leave the country, however, becomes pretty small. A large chunk of the politically active Burmese community living overseas fled the country back in late 1980s/early 1990s by crossing the borders illegally with the assistance of Burmese ethnic minority groups that were engaged in armed conflict with the government. Many of them have not been able to return since because of their political opinions.

Burmese citizens who have traveled outside their country in more recent years are generally in two categories:

- i) Those who are farmers or unskilled workers from lower-income groups who are barely able to survive due to government violations or repressive policies. These kinds of persons cross the border illegally into Burma's neighbouring countries such as Thailand or India. I would say the majority of this group are from Burmese ethnic minorities. If they do make it to Canada or other western countries, it is often as refugees who have been granted third country resettlement.
- ii) Those who are more educated, economically better-off, and get official permission to leave the country for purposes such as studying abroad, or working abroad. I would say the majority of these are from the Burman majority group and people from this category have an easier time reaching Canada or other western countries.

I have been asked to provide affidavits of support for Burmese asylum seekers in my home country, the USA, and they are generally from the second category. What I have found to be the norm in those cases is that the asylum seeker came to the US as a student and then became active in the pro-democracy movement. If the activities were largely of limited scope, such as marching in a peace rally at their college campus, or writing an op-ed in their college newspaper on Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday, then it is highly unlikely that the government of Burma will be able to/would even be interested in monitoring the activities of such individuals.

If however, the individuals had one or two minor experiences with political activism in Burma, and then after coming to the US became much more active in terms of joining political groups like the US Campaign for Burma, spoke out at political gatherings of Burmese in exile, even met President Bush (as a Burmese refugee woman did in 2005) then the chances of their being monitored become much higher. One way to gauge if Burmese living overseas are being monitored would be to try to find out if the situation for their families inside Burma has changed in any way (so for example, has the family received visits from the Burmese authorities since the person became politically active, that would definitely be an indication that the authorities are aware). (Country Analyst 27 July 2007)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC). 30 July 2007. Correspondence from a projects officer.

\_\_\_\_\_. 13 November 2001. "Background of ALRC." <<http://www.alrc.net/doc/mainfile.php/background/2/>> [Accessed 30 July 2007]

Country Analyst for Asia, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). 27 July 2007. Correspondence.

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*Travel Information Manual* (TIM). August 2007. "Myanmar." Badhoevedorp, The Netherlands: International Air Transport Association (IATA) Netherlands Data Publications.

United Nations (UN). 12 February 2004. Economic, and Social Council. "Written Statement Submitted by the Asian Legal Resource Centre." (E/CN.4/2004/NGO/29)

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United States (US). 6 March 2007. Department of State. "Burma." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006*. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78768.htm>> [Accessed 25 July 2007]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** The Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Rights and Democracy, Refugees International and a consultant with the Irish Centre for Human Rights and International Institute for Criminal Investigation did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

The United States Campaign for Burma did not have information on the subject.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), European Country of Origin Information Network (Ecoi.net), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mizzima News, Myanmar Digest, *The Myanmar Times and Business Review* [Rangoon], Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Refugees International, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), United States Campaign for Burma, World News Connection.

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