



# ACU's Thai-Burma Program: Engagement with the Myanmar refugee crisis



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# Introduction to ACU's Thai-Burma Program

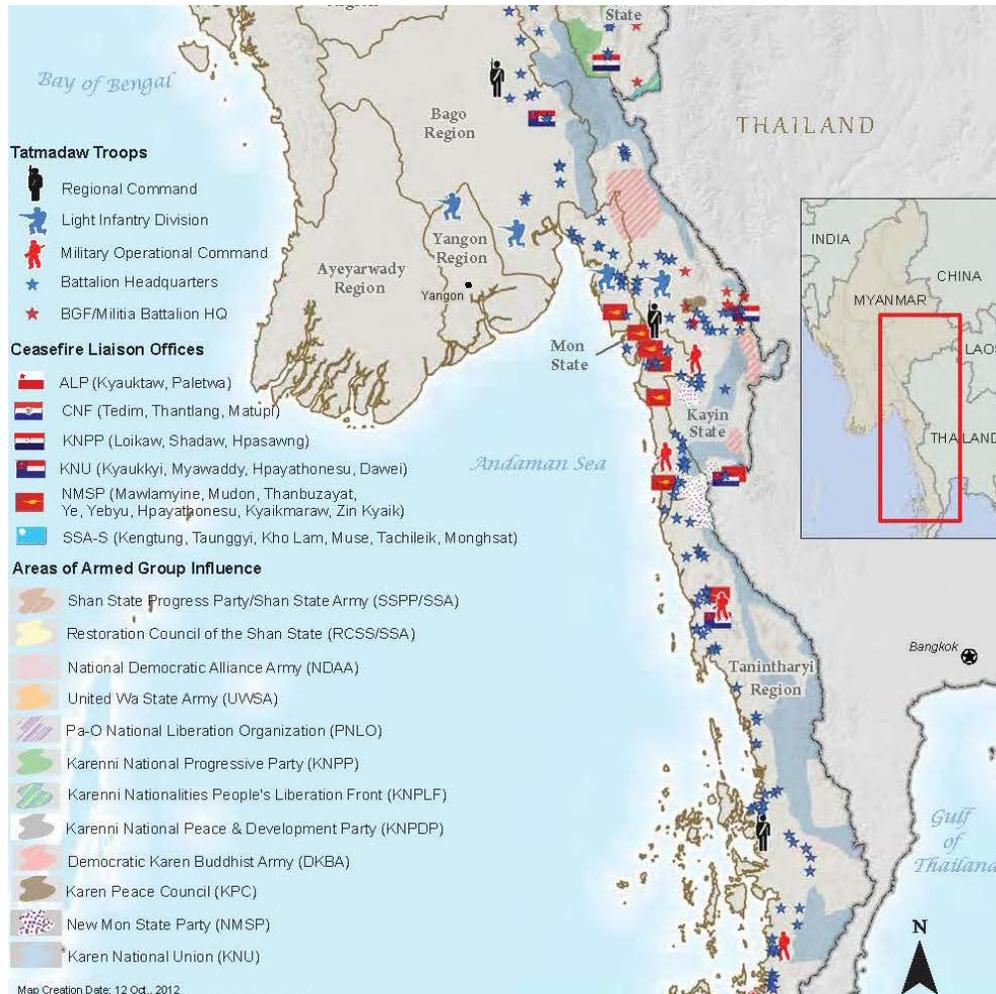
Introduction video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtvaXe2GYrQ>

# The East Myanmar-Thailand context



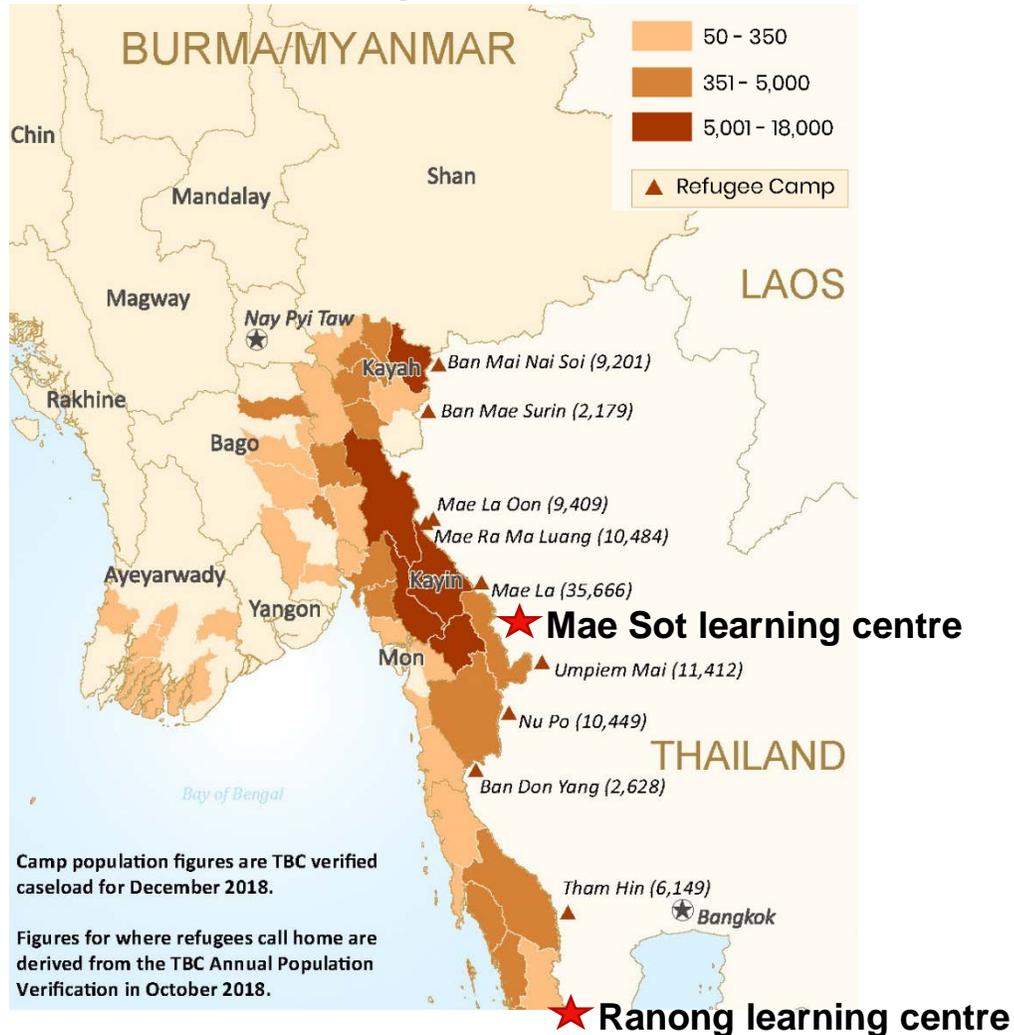
- Myanmar (formerly Burma)
- Approx. 6000 km northwest of Australia
- Population: Approx. 54 million
- At least 135 distinct ethnic groups
- Land borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and **Thailand**

# Historical/Political context of the refugee crisis



- Thai-My border refugees since 1984
- Conflict dates back to at least 1949
- Longest running civil war in the world
- Multiple East Myanmar ethnic groups fleeing armed conflict and persecution for three decades: Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan, but others as well
- ‘Slow genocide’ of ethnic minorities
- Human rights violations by Burmese government
- 2011: military-regime to a military-controlled government

# The Thai-Myanmar Border context



- Approx. 100,000 refugees in 9 camps in TL
- Largest camp: Mae La, c. 36,000 people
- Thailand: no national asylum systems, refugees often considered illegal migrants
- No organised access to Thai education system
- ACU's operations focused on two border sites
- **Mae Sot** (services massive central East refugee community)
- **Ranong** (services remote, smaller refugee community in southern Thailand)

# The TB Program Diploma in Liberal Studies



- Community-embedded tertiary education in protracted refugee contexts
- Operating since 2009
- Diploma in Liberal Studies, in English
- 8 unit Diploma using blended, connected learning delivery
- Opportunities for refugee students to study with ACU domestic students
- Graduates return to the communities and their education has a 'multiplier effect', accelerating community development
- Partner organisations: Marist Asia Foundation (MAF), York University (Canada), Palms Australia
- International activities: Connected Learning Consortium (CLCC, UNHCR) and other forums

## Program outcomes



- Graduated 252 students from the program
- Nearly 100% student retention rate
- Long-term average gender balance: 52% female
- Graduates employed in NGOs or private sector, in Thailand and Myanmar
- 10-20% of graduates matriculate to further University education
- Post-ACU destination Universities in Hong Kong, Germany, Thailand, Bangladesh, Myanmar and USA

## Thai-Burma Program graduates (some examples)



- Gum San Seng (class of 2014)
- Zwe Myat Chan (class of 2019)
- Shwe Zin Thin (pictured) (class of 2016)

# Challenges and future



- Delivering education overseas, to refugee learners captive in a military dictatorship
- Outdated and decrepit infrastructure
- Interruptions to learning: military crackdowns, natural disasters
- Matching University systems to the lives of refugee learners
- Refugee repatriation processes
- Expensive education to deliver
- Current cohort 2019-2020: 48 students
- Pilot study of new degree program: Certificate in Teaching in Learning in Ranong (SoE)

# Impact through empathy



- The TB Program is the concrete expression of ACU's commitment to 'impact through empathy'
- Transformational education for community development in crises contexts
- Only tertiary education opportunity for the 100,000 strong refugee community
- Recognised as exemplar model of refugee education by the UNHCR
- Over 14 years commitment on the Th-My border
- New partnerships with regional organisations to grow and ensure sustainability