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Press Release

Response to the Arrival of Burmese Refugees in the Czech Republic

Prague, 3 November 2008 – On October 30th 2008, 23 quota refugees from the Chin ethnic group of Burma arrived in the Czech Republic as part of a resettlement program arranged by the Czech government and the UNHCR. These persons are the first group of a planned total of 40 refugees. More might follow.

The Czech nonprofit NGO Burma Center Prague (BCP) recommends Czech officials to make all necessary provisions for the immigrants' integration into Czech society in a timely manner. Furthermore, it strongly encourages those in charge of the program to seek consultation with experts and authorities inside the Czech Republic in future even prior to the decision-making phase. BCP is also of the opinion that investment into integration needs to continue well after the time of arrival and the necessary resources need to be pledged accordingly. "It is in our common interest for the resettlement program to ultimately be considered successful," says Sabe Soe, director of Burma Center Prague.

"Our organization appreciates the Czech government's long-standing engagement in improving the situation for the people of Burma, which in no small part includes caring for Burmese refugees," says Soe. BCP considers it crucial for both the resettlement program and Czech asylum policy to be based on a well-designed, long-term concept considering the particular needs of the refugees as defined by their great cultural and linguistic distinctness, their migrant background, and the given opportunities to accomplish social integration. Hopefully this integration will result in the active contribution of the newcomers to civil society for the benefit of Burma and the Czech Republic.

Being the only local organization advocating the rights of Burmese living in the Czech Republic, BCP will continue to closely monitor the performance of the integration program with a particular view toward the refugees' well-being. BCP emphasizes the need to provide sustained support to these individuals in order to facilitate their successful integration.

The Burma Center Prague is presently contributing to the resettlement program by providing translation and interpretation, by training and advising Czech staff involved in the program about Burma and the refugees' cultural background, and by teaching the refugees about the basics of European culture, living conditions and administrative affairs.