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PRESS RELEASE

Burma Center Prague Launches Microgrant Program for Burmese Refugees with New Platform for Online Donations

Prague – 19.7.2010. Burma Center Prague o.p.s. has launched its microgrant program to support grassroots groups in India working for the benefit of Burmese refugees and transition in Burma. Through the program, 19 local organizations in New Delhi and northeastern India will receive microgrants to enable them to run a variety of projects ranging from free health clinics to adult vocational training.

“With this new program, Czech citizens can directly support Burmese initiatives designed to help disadvantaged refugees struggling to make a living in India,” explains Sabe Soe, director of the Czech nonprofit organization Burma Center Prague. “Even a small donation of 500 CZK can have a tremendous impact on the lives of refugees. One hundred percent of the funding will go directly to the projects and will help immediately.”

One of the special features of this program is how donors are integrated: individuals can view a detailed online presentation of all the projects and with the simple click of the mouse can choose which projects they wish to support and at what amount, starting from just 500 CZK. Burma Center Prague, the NGO implementing the microgrant project, hopes that through this platform many new donors who are not complacent about the people of Burma can be found.

The web site can be found at www.mikrogranty.cz. All pages are in Czech and English.

The program has been in preparation since 2009, when during a fact-finding trip to India the Burma Center Prague team was shocked to learn about the incredible suffering of Burmese refugees living there. While a multitude of home-grown initiatives exists formally, only few of them have managed to launch meaningful operations since they are maintained by refugees who have to spend their entire earnings for their survival. These initiatives therefore lack even the most basic funding. With Czech donors' help, 19 grassroots organizations will now receive amounts between 9,000 and 15,000 CZK for clearly defined activities. Implementation should be completed by the end of November, and the activities are expected to continue beyond 2010 through the efforts of the organizations themselves.

The projects receiving a grant have been carefully selected by Burma Center Prague and its partner Burma Centre Delhi, on criteria including the project's relevance, its benefit for the target group, the justification of planned expenditures, and the applicant's capacity to handle the project. While funding for the microgrants is largely covered by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Transition Promotion Program, Burma Center Prague is now seeking individual supporters who will purchase ‘shares’ in the projects of their choice to contribute to the total funding amount required.

The support of Burmese grassroots organizations through microgrants forms a central pillar of the three-year project "Indian Base for Democracy in Burma." This project is one of the most tangible results of

Czech foreign policy to support human rights in Burma and alleviate the suffering of Burmese who have had to flee their country. The Czech Republic seeks to use its own experience of a totalitarian past in order to help other countries to overcome present hardship and facilitate transition to democracy.

Background Information:

Millions of Burmese from all ethnic groups have had to leave Burma in search of work, safety, food, and shelter. But upon entering a neighbouring country such as India, these unprotected refugees find themselves in a dangerous and vulnerable position. Deprived of legal protection until they manage after months or years to obtain refugee status from the UNHCR, they are frequent victims of assault, forced displacement, expropriation and bullying by employers and landlords, with a high rate falling victim to sexual harassment and gang rape.

Lacking public support and being uninvited foreigners, Burmese refugees in India have to rely entirely on their own community. Local self-reliant aid groups are operated by engaged and courageous individuals with donations collected from within the community. Most global attention, however, is focused on issues inside Burma or on India's domestic problems, rather than on the plight of Burmese refugees in India. Thus the refugees have to keep a very low profile - contributing to a vicious circle where invisibility breeds vulnerability and financial distress that in turn result in a lack of capacity development and advocacy for one's rights.

Burma Center Prague o.p.s., the organizer of the microgrant program, was founded in the Czech Republic in 2006 in order to aid the Burmese community in the Czech Republic and internationally. Its mission is to contribute to the democratization of Burma, to support human rights there, and to improve the situation of the people in Burma and those Burmese in exile.

Information for journalists:

To learn more about the program and how you can invest in the future of Burma, please visit www.mikrogranty.cz. If you are interested in obtaining an interview with the director of Burma Center Prague, Mrs. Sabe A. Soe, please contact the office using the information below.

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TRANSITION
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