

# MON STATE PROFILE

UPDATED: JUNE 2014<sup>1</sup>



State	Mon
Flag	
Previous Name	Mon
State Capital	Mawlamyine
Number of Districts	2
Number of Townships	10
Ward and Village Tract	463
Total Population (2013 Est.)	3,165,275
IDPs (2012 Est.)	35,000
Refugees (2013)	3,952
Area	4,748 sq. miles / 12,297 sq. kms
Border	North: Bago Region East: Kayin State West: Andaman Sea and Gulf of Mottama South: Thailand and Tanintharyi Region
Latitude	4°52' N and 17°32' N
Longitude	96° 51' E and 98° 13' E
Ethnicities	Mon, Bamar, Kayin, Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Shan and Pa-O

Map: Myanmar Information Management Unit

## Background

Located on the western coast of South-East Myanmar, Mon State is bounded by Bago Region to the north, Kayin State to the east, Tanintharyi Region and Thailand to the south, and the Andaman Sea and Gulf of Mottama to the west. In contrast to its neighbours, Mon State has maintained its name since being carved out of Tanintharyi Region - then known as Tenasserim Division - in 1974. The contemporary armed conflict in Mon State mirrored the situation in Kayin State for decades until the 1995 ceasefire between the government and the New Mon State Party (NMSPP). Since then Mon state has been relatively stable and peaceful, although not all refugees and IDPs have yet found a solution to their displacement.

While the history of the Mon people is closely linked to the pre-colonial development of present day Myanmar and Thailand, the distinct identity eroded somewhat under British rule, as the colonial administration did not administer the Mon areas as it did other ethnic groups in border areas. Contemporary Mon nationalism began to ferment during the final decades of British colonialism, culminating in the establishment of the United Mon

<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: These state profiles were printed in June 2014, and will be updated periodically by the UNHCR South-East Myanmar Information Management Unit to reflect new developments, additions and corrections.



Association (UMA) in November 1945. As the first explicitly Mon nationalist organization, the UMA campaigned for official recognition of the Mon people as a distinct group within an independent Burma, working at the time with Aung San's Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). However, the Mon were not invited to the historic Panglong Conference in February 1947, because they had not been recognized as a distinct border people, leading to a split with the AFPFL and the creation of the separatist Mon Freedom League (MFL) later that year.

The MFL quickly joined with the Mon Affairs Organization (MAO) to create the Mon United Front (MUF), which formed the Mon National Defence Organisation (MNDO), an armed wing modeled after the Karen National Union's (KNU) own military branch the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). While the non-state armed group followed the KNU's lead in going underground in 1949, it reshuffled its organization in subsequent years, renaming itself the Mon People's Front (MPF) before signing a ceasefire agreement in July 1958. The NMSP emerged as a splinter group following the MPF surrender, adopting an explicitly separatist stance and establishing the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) in 1971. Working closely with the KNU and other powerful non-state armed groups through the 1970s and 1980s, the NMSP struggled with internal divisions, splitting into two affiliated factions between 1981 and 1987, all the while maintaining the broad support of the Mon community in and around Mon State.

Throughout the early nineties, Mon State saw an increase in Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) activities and clashes between the government and NSAs, including NMSP and KNU. Several events contributed to rising tensions, including the constructions of a 160 km railway link from Ye to Dawei, as well as the establishment of the Yadana and Yetagun Gas pipelines, which coupled with counter-insurgency tactics pushed the NMSP into a defensive position. The Tatmadaw offensive culminated in the fall of the NMSP Headquarters at Three Pagoda Pass in 1990, forcing thousands to flee to refugee camps in Thailand, and displacing up to 35,000 within Ye Township as well. Similar to the Karenni National Progressive Party in Kayah State, the NMSP began ceasefire negotiations from a defensive position in late 1993, yielding an agreement in June 1995.

The ceasefire agreement granted the NSMP control of 12 cantonments throughout Mon State, including around Mawlamyine and Ye Townships, and provided the NMSP with a variety of industrial concessions in logging, fishing, inland transportation and gold mining. Although the ceasefire has held for nearly two decades, the relationship between the government and the NMSP has cooled at times, including around the mid-2000s, although outright clashes have been avoided. For example, the Border Consortium's (TBC) estimated IDP totals rose from 31,000 in 2003 to 48,700 in 2004. The NMSP's refusal in 2010 to transform into the government's Border Guard Force (BGF) also heightened tensions dramatically, and led many to fear the ceasefire would break, however renewed conflict was ultimately averted.

Perhaps the most troubling factor in the NMSP's 1995 ceasefire agreement, particularly as far as UNHCR and humanitarian organizations are concerned, was the return of Mon refugees from Thailand. Approximately 10,000 Mon refugees fled to Thailand following the Tatmadaw's advances in 1990, however the first camps lacked stability, first due to their location near the border and later as they were moved to other temporary locations by Thai authorities. By 1993, with the NMSP under pressure to sign a ceasefire agreement and the Myanmar and Thai governments working together, the return of refugees began when the Royal Thai Army pushed 545 individuals back in April 1993. By March 1996 all 10,000 refugees had returned in a less than voluntary manner, primarily being resettled in three NMSP-controlled temporary settlements known as Halockhani, Bee Ree and Tavoy,<sup>2</sup> which still host several thousands of individuals as of 2014.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although part of NMSP territory and accommodating individuals of Mon State origin, Halockhani is on the border with Kayah State and the Tavoy site is in Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region.

<sup>3</sup> Further details on this can be found in several sources under References, including the forthcoming UNHCR Research Paper, *Ceasefires and durable solutions in Myanmar: a lessons learned review*, by Kim Jolliffe and with a commentary from Ashley South.



## Population Profile

As elsewhere in Myanmar, all population figures since the last census in 1983 are either extrapolated from indirect sources or represent educated guesses. In the 1983 census the population of Mon State was 1,682,041 individuals, a total that was estimated in 2013 to have risen to 3,165,275, according to the General Administration Department (GAD). However, the population of Mon State is not homogenous, as significant minority populations are present from the Bamar, Rakhine and Karen ethnic groups, with Mawlamyine especially diverse, with thriving Christian, Muslim and Hindu communities. Nonetheless, the vast majority of Mon state residents are believed to be Buddhist. The contemporary Mon population is concentrated within but not limited to Mon State, with notable pockets in Bago Region, the Ayeyardwaddy Delta, as well as in Thailand.

The Mon people are one of the oldest civilizations in South-East Asia, with a recorded history dating back more than a millennium, and are believed to be a major source of influence for the cultures of Myanmar and Thailand, particularly regarding the spread of Buddhist religion. Researchers have documented the rich and vibrant history of the Mons, which most recently peaked with the kingdom of Hongsawatoi from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century, re-emerging in the 18<sup>th</sup> century before colonialism. Contemporary Mon nationalists have long drawn on the nostalgia of this golden age in Mon history as a source of inspiration and legitimization, however the links between Mon culture, ethnicity, identity and language are varied and imperfect, as many have been assimilated into the dominant Bamar culture in the past two centuries. For example, while up to eight million people may be of Mon ethnicity and descent in Myanmar, only an estimated one million Mon speakers remain, a disconnect between ethnicity and language that has reportedly been apparent since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Township	Refugees (2013) <sup>4</sup>	IDPs (2012)
Bilin	1923	0
Chaungzon	31	0
Kyaikmaraw	126	0
Kyaikto	33	0
Mawlamyine	332	0
Mudon	31	0
Paung	201	0
Thanbyuzayat	16	0
Thaton	1179	0
Ye	67	35,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,952</b>	<b>35,000</b>

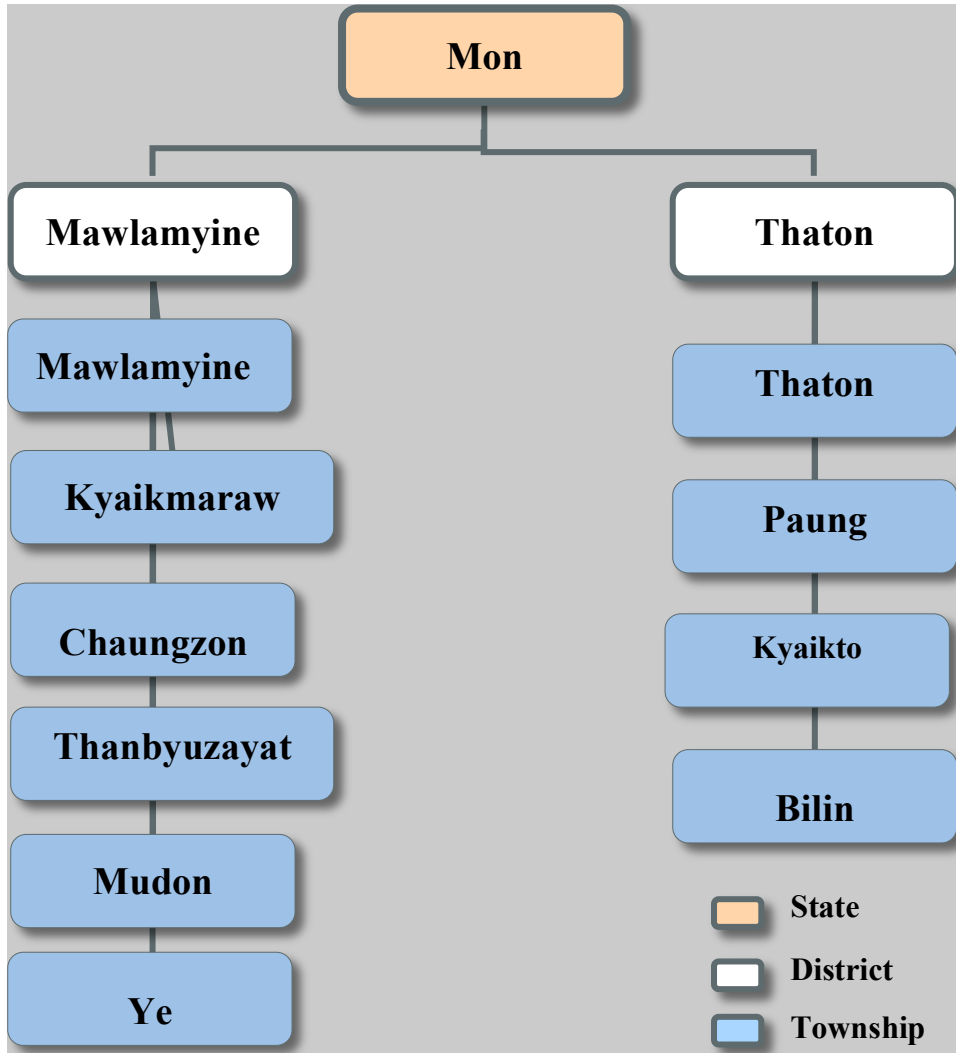
The contemporary displacement of civilians from Mon State dates back primarily to the early 1990s, when the Tatmadaw offensives detailed above pushed back the NMSP. Approximately 10,000 refugees fled Mon State to Thailand between then and the mid-1990s, almost all of whom returned around the 1995 ceasefire, although subsequent displacement has occurred. As of August 2013, there were 3,952 registered and unregistered refugees in Thailand who listed their place of origin as Mon State, approximately half of which have arrived since 2006. There is also still considerable internal displacement in Ye Township, with estimates ranging from 35,000 to 80,000, although many of them may have by now effectively settled permanent in their new locations.

## Administrative Divisions

<sup>4</sup> Refugee figures are registered totals according to UNHCR ProGres database, and do not include the unregistered caseload. IDP totals are from TBC.



There are ten townships in Mon State spread across two districts, Mawlamyine and Thaton. Ye Township in south-eastern Mon State also has two sub-townships, Khaw Zar and La Mine. According to the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), there are place codes for over 1100 villages in the state. As elsewhere, there are a total of 11 ministries working under the supervision of the Chief Minister, who took office in April 2011. The state capital Mawlamyine, with a population of between 300,000 to 450,000, is the largest city in South-East Myanmar, and the fourth largest in the country.



### Names of Ministers and Ministries in Mon State

Mon State			
#	Name	Minister	Party
1.	Ohn Myint	Chief Minister	USDP
2.	Col Htay Myint Aung	Ministry of Security and Border Affairs	Military-appointed
3.	Khin Maung Thwin	Ministry of Finance and Revenue	USDP
4.	Myo Nyunt	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Breeding	USDP
5.	Win Maw Oo	Ministry of Forestry and Mines	USDP
6.	Tun Yi aka Min Nwe Soe	Ministry of Planning and Economics	AMRDP



7.	Tun Hlaing	Ministry of Transport	USDP
8.	Naing Lawi Aung	Ministry of Electric Power and Industry	AMRDP
9.	Toe Toe Aung	Ministry of Development Affairs	USDP
10.	Hla Oo	Ministry of Social Affairs	USDP
11.	Aung Kyaw Thein	Ministry of National Races Affairs (Karen)	USDP
12.	Pe Mya aka Khun Pe Mya	Ministry of National Races Affairs (Pao)	USDP
13.	Thet Win	Ministry of National Races Affairs (Bamar)	USDP

## Non-State Actors

The NMSP has been the dominant NSA in Mon State since being established as a splinter group after the MPF ceasefire in 1958, with its armed wing (MNLA) emerging in 1971. The NMSP received early support and guidance from the KNU, which remained its primary ally in subsequent decades. Both organizations were part of the National Democratic Front (NDF) and in the mid-1980s shifted their demands from sovereignty to federalism. Although the NMSP has historically maintained a very small stable of troops relative to other NMSPs, it also has a reputation for organization and professionalism. While both the NMSP and KNU suffered a series of defeats to the Tatmadaw in the early 1990s, only the NMSP conceded defeat at the time. While the NMSP struggled to maintain unity at times throughout its decades of armed rebellion, including splitting into two factions between 1981 and 1987, the sources of internal tension were primarily related to ideology and control of patronage and resources, rather than a product of broader divides within the Mon community.<sup>5</sup>

Following the 1995 ceasefire agreement, a handful of splinter groups spawned from the NMSP, mostly concentrated around Ye Township and northern Tanintharyi Region, mostly modeled as self-defence militias, and almost all with fleeting relevance. The first major splinter group was the Mon Army Mergui District (MAMD), which formed in the immediate aftermath of the ceasefire and signed its own ceasefire agreement in 1997 after a series of clashes with the Tatmadaw. The Mon Peace Group (MPG) emerged in 1997, with scattered clashes throughout the 2000s, including in affiliation with the Tatmadaw, although its current status is unknown. In 2001 the Mon Restoration Party (aka. the Hongsawatoi Restoration Party)) was formed and clashed with the Tatmadaw around Ye Township in both 2002 and 2007 before being driven out of NMSP territory. None of these splinter groups are currently believed to clearly hold territory or engage in active armed conflict in Mon State.

Both the KNU and its own major splinter group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), have at times been involved militarily in Mon State, although neither purport to represent the interests of the Mon people. In addition to serving as a historical ally to the NMSP, the KNU's map of a Karen free state (known locally as Kawthoolei) overlaps with the official boundaries of Mon State. KNU Brigade 1 has long been active in north-eastern Mon State and the NSA opened a liaison office (its sixth overall) in Naung Bo village, Thaton Township, in March 2013. Meanwhile, as a ceasefire group that accepted being incorporated into the BGF, the DKBA has reportedly attended meetings and military training sessions in Mon State, and has previously clashed with the Tatmadaw, NMSP and KNU around Three Pagoda Pass, a strategically significant trading point for all stakeholders.

## Ceasefire Updates

### Opposition Group

### New Mon State Party (NMSP)

<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the KNU split with the DKBA was influenced by concerns about representation among the Buddhist and Christian components within the Karen community.



<b>Location</b>	Based in Mon State.
<b>Cease-fires agreements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signed ceasefire agreement with the government on 29 June 1995.</li> <li>• The agreement was broken in 2010 as the government asked NMSP to transform into BGF but NMSP refused to join.</li> <li>• The NMSP held state-level talks with the government negotiators in Mawlamyine on 1 February 2012.</li> <li>• Government negotiation team met with NMSP on 22 December 2011 in Sangkhalburi, Thailand.</li> <li>• The NMSP held Union-level talk with the government negotiators on 25 February 2012, when the initial peace agreement was signed.</li> </ul>
<b>Situation Updates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NMSP has called on the government to open a political dialogue within 45 days of the start of a nationwide ceasefire.</li> <li>• Political prisoners of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) have yet to be released, even though the government negotiator said they would be released after signing the peace agreement.</li> <li>• The New Mon State Party (NMSP)'s peace delegation left its headquarters in Yaechaungphyar on 10 April 2012 for union-level talks with the government.</li> <li>• The New Mon State Party (NMSP) held the political dialogue with the government delegation team on 11 April 2012.</li> <li>• Nai Yekkha and Nai Myo Twe from New Mon State Party who were serving life sentences in Myanmar's notorious jails were released on 30 April 2012 by Myanmar government. The release of the political prisoners came on the back of a ceasefire the NMSP recently signed with the Myanmar government.</li> <li>• The Mon National Democratic Front, which won five seats in the annual 1990's general election, has been approved to register under the new party name-the Mon Democracy Party.</li> <li>• The situation between has been relatively calm between the government and NMSP in 2013 and 2014.</li> </ul>

<b>Opposition Group</b>	<b>Karen National Union (KNU)</b>
<b>Location</b>	Based in Mon State and Kayin State
<b>Cease-fires agreements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ceasefire negotiations had been underway since 1989</li> <li>• KNU signed a ceasefire agreement on Thursday, 12 January 2012 with the government of Myanmar</li> </ul>
<b>Situation Updates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the Union level meeting between the two sides in September 2012, the KNU had asked the government to withdraw 90 out of the 300 government army camps in Division (1) to (7) that fall under territory controlled by the KNU.</li> <li>• KNU opened their sixth liaison office 5 March 2013 in Naung Bo village, Thaton Township, Mon State</li> </ul>

<b>Opposition Group</b>	<b>Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)</b>
<b>Location</b>	Mon State and Kayin State



<b>Cease-fires agreements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DKBA and government delegations signed a cease-fire agreement at home of the Karen State Chief Minister in Hpa-An on November 3, 2011.</li> <li>• Most DKBA troops are breakaway factions of the Karen National Union (KNU) that separated from the KNU in 1994. They agreed to join the government’s BGF under the command of Myanmar officers 18 August 2010.</li> </ul>
<b>Situation Updates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the Democratic Karen Buddha Army (DKBA), who accepted the Burmese government’s Border Guard Force (BGF) offer in August 2010, have attended a government-run military training in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State. Since August 2010, over 200 former DKBA soldiers have been attending the BGF training, held at Wekali village, Thanbyuzayat Township.</li> </ul>

## Economy and Livelihoods

Owing to the relative stability since the NMSP ceasefire, the local economy and markets are more established in Mon State, and a variety of industries have advanced in recent years. However, the overall political change in Myanmar still provides significant reason for optimism in Mon State, as most sectors remain underdeveloped and socio-economic indicators suggest there are considerable development needs in the state. Nonetheless, Mon State is in a comparatively better situation to absorb and benefit from the current rush of investment into the emerging South-East, although a sustainable, responsible and coordinated approach remains pivotal. Overall, the state capital Mawlamyine is well established as the trading and shipping hub for South-East Myanmar.

As elsewhere in South-East Myanmar, the people of Mon State have traditionally relied extensively on agriculture for their livelihoods, with large areas of arable flat land throughout the area. With a total of approximately three million acres of cultivatable land, most are used for rice paddies. Other major crops in Mon State include corn, groundnut, sunflower, cashew nuts, sugarcane, coconut, palm oil, cocoa and various type of fruit, some of which (eg. mangosteen, pomelo) are known as the best countrywide.

Fishing along the state’s western coast has historically supplemented incomes and diets, both for wholesale markets, as well as the processing of dried fish and algae for production of fish sauce, paste, spices and agar-agar. Mining is also an emerging industry in Mon State, with antimony, granite and gold mined in various places. There are also several state-owned enterprises in Mon State, including rubber and tire factors and a coal power station near Mawlamyine, as well as rubber plantations, although the industry is not as significant in Mon State as elsewhere in the region.

## Services and Infrastructure

Another benefit to the recent stability has been the integration of the state and non-state service sectors in Mon State, which may serve as a useful model for other states still focused on early recovery and peace-building. For one, the public sectors are well established in Mon State. As of 2013, there are 1221 primary schools, 97 middle schools and 80 high schools in the public system, with student teacher ratios ranging from 20 to 35 pupils per instructor. For health, while many facilities remain concentrated in the capital Mawlamyine, there are a total of 32 hospitals spread across Mon State, along with 64 rural health centres and 285 rural health sub-centres. While the quality of services requires continued improvement and capacity building, the foundation is solid.

At the peak of its insurgency the NMSP played the role of a quasi-state actor, including in coordinating an expansive education system emphasizing Mon culture, and in turn bolstering its own legitimacy. However, the NMSP’s role in direct service provision has declined since the early 1990s, with civil society organizations



proliferating to fill the gaps, working with the government and NMSP to continue the administration of the non-state education system.<sup>6</sup> Drawing on strong community support, approximately 150 Mon national schools are scattered throughout the state, while the state government and the Mon National Education Committee jointly manage another 100 mixed schools. The reason this serves as a best practice for the integration of other systems is that in both cases students are able to sit the exams in the public system and cross-over upon graduation from the non-state and mixed schools.

Meanwhile, Mon State is marginally more developed than Kayin and Kayah state in terms of physical infrastructure. The highway from Yangon is a major transport route through the South-East, following the coast through Mon State south to Tanintharyi Region, however until the Thanlwin Bridge opened in 2005, continuing to Mawlamyine required taking a ferry at the confluence of the Thanlwin, Gyaing and Attayan Rivers. A commercially significant highway also continues through Ye Township to Three Pagoda Pass, an official border crossing and major trading route with Thailand. The main rail link from Yangon and East Bago continues through Mawlamyine, with stations in Kyaikto, Mawlamyine, Thanbyuzayat and Ye Townships. Mon State is also the location of one airport in Mawlamyine, which is serviced by weekly flights to Yangon and daily flights to Mae Sot, Thailand.<sup>7</sup>

In regards to power, the main power plant is located in Mawlamyine, however the planned upgrades of a facility in Thaton and of a natural gas turbine plant in Mawlamyine provide reason for optimism. A coal-fired power plant is also being constructed in Ye Township, which would generate 1280 megawatts of power for the local area, but this project has been hampered by ongoing protests by local residents from the nearby Inn Din village. The gas pipelines discussed above, which originate in Dawei Township in Tanintharyi Region and was a source of considerable tension and displacement in the 1990s, are now connected to Mon State.

## Protection and Durable Solutions

Because the NMSP ceasefire has mostly held since 1995, with only occasional tensions but no armed confrontations, the security environment in Mon State is relatively calm, particularly throughout most central and northern areas, with fairly well established freedom of movement for all civilians. However, parts of Ye Township have experienced intermittent clashes involving other NSAs at times, including around the strategically significant Three Pagoda Pass border area.

The issue of landmines continues to be a protection concern throughout Myanmar, including in Mon State, with Bilin, Kyaikto, Thaton and Ye suspected to be most contaminated. Save the Children already has a mine action program in Thanbyuzayat and Ye townships, while the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) will start rolling out its mine action program in 2014. Areas of Ye Township have already been selected as pilots for surveillance and clearance, based on villages suggested by NPA to the state government and NMSP.

The problematic return of Mon refugees from Thailand in the mid-1990s was a serious protection concern at the time, and the condition of these and other displaced populations in Ye township remains a concern. Cross-border assistance is provided in the three temporary settlements near the border, Halockhani, Bee Ree (also recognized as Ye Chaung Pyar) and Tavoy, as international humanitarian actors such as TBC have been permitted to deliver aid to the temporary settlements since the mid-1990s in coordination with the Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC), which administers the sites. However, such cross-border assistance is now very minimal.

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<sup>6</sup> As a condition of the 1995 ceasefire agreement, the NMSP and many of the Mon NGOs and civil society organizations, received government funding between 1995 and 2005.

<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, the daily Nok Air flights to Mae Sot had been suspended pending rehabilitation work on the runway at Mawlamyine Airport. The flights are scheduled to recommence in April 2014.





UNHCR recently accessed the Bee Ree settlement from the Myanmar and has since provided some assistance to the population there, with discussions ongoing about conducting assessments at the other sites in the near future. The Bee Ree field assessment revealed that while there these populations still have considerable needs, particularly pertaining to livelihoods, it is unclear how many they are still awaiting an alternative solution to their displacement or plan to remain where they are. Rather, the focus going forward will be primarily on providing appropriate support and assistance to the people of concern in these settlements.

Meanwhile, the tensions which lingered in Ye Township throughout the 2000s, highlighted by the presence of several state and non-state armed actors around Three Pagoda Pass, has resulted in protracted displacement. Whereas most of Mon State has been spared forced labour, arbitrary taxation and land confiscation in recent years, reports still emerge in this area. The impact of this instability and tension is exacerbated by the fact that this part of Mon State is not optimal for most forms of agriculture, and many of the main access roads are cut off during the rainy season. As a result, some of the development actors working in Mon State have especially focused their activities in Ye township. However, similar to the case of the resettlement sites in Halockhani, Bee Ree and Tavoy, is it unclear whether a significant proportion of these IDPs are still waiting to return to their villages of origin.

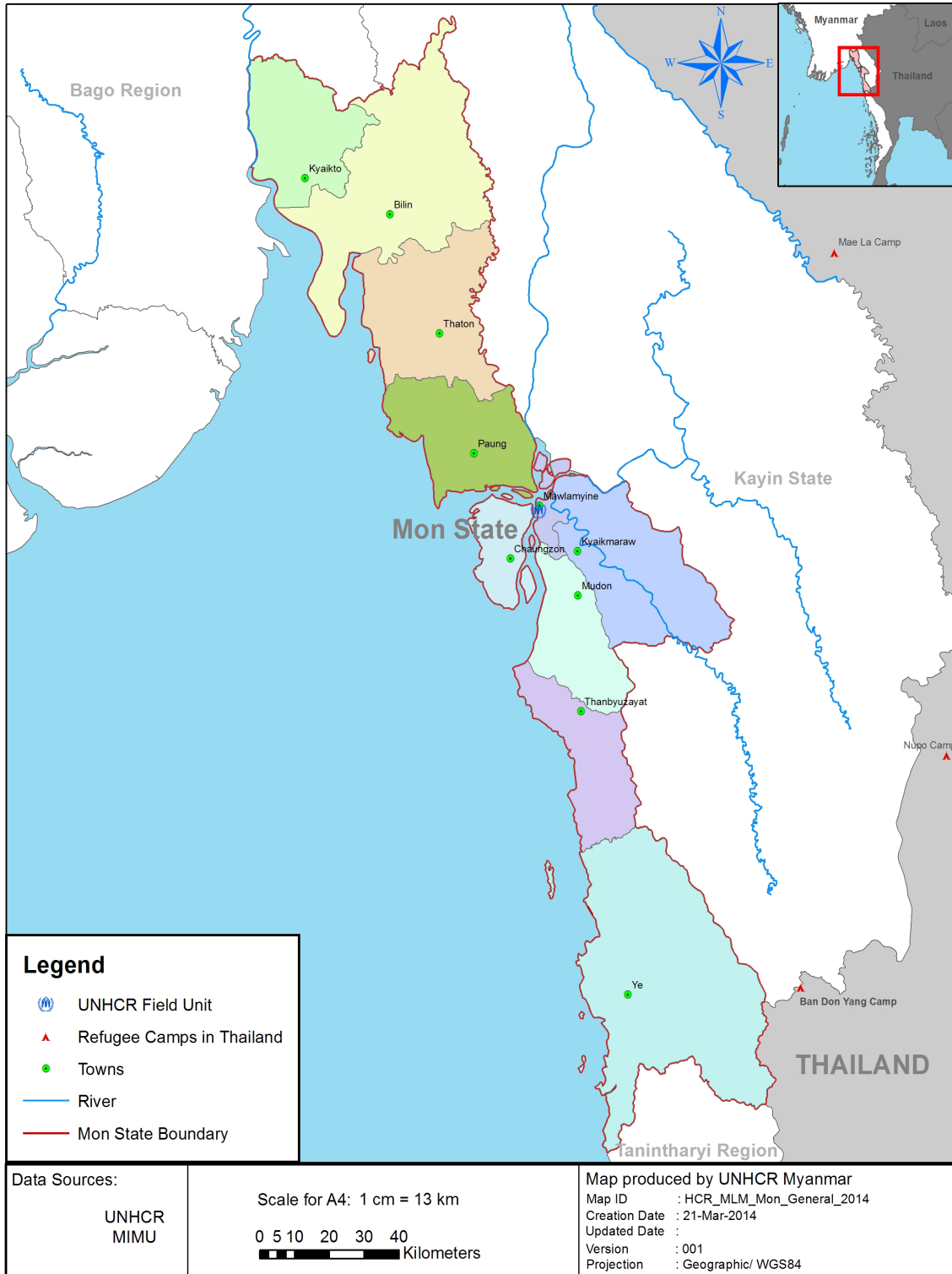
The approximately 4000 refugees from Mon State remaining in Thailand are primarily from Bilin and Thaton Townships. From UNHCR's return monitoring work in 2013 and 2014, only a very small number of refugees from Mon State have returned since 2012. As of May 2014, UNHCR had conducted 93 return assessments in Mon State, and while 42 of those were confirmed as villages of origin for refugees, the presence of refugee returnees was verified in only six villages. In discussing with key informants in villages of origin, it appears that while some refugees want to see further progress with the peace process before attempting permanent return, many have no immediate desire to return at the moment. Overall, the state government is not as concerned with refugee returns as elsewhere in the South-East, although KNU Brigade 1 and the government are collaborating on two planned pilot projects in Bilin and Thaton townships for IDP and refugee returnees.



# Annex 1: General Map



## Mon State



Disclaimer: The names shown and the boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNHCR



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