

## PAIR Update

Issue 02  
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### About PAIR Update

The *PAIR Update* is a periodic newsletter intended to keep interested individuals “in the know” about PAIR’s latest activities. We hope you enjoy it! Please let us know if you’d like us to add any of your friends or family to the distribution list.

### Did you know?

Two PAIR College Counseling students, Peace and Vikash, led a workshop at the **2010 Greater Houston PeaceJam Conference** in March. Peace spoke about her journey across Africa as a refugee from **Rwanda**, and Vikash spoke about his life in a refugee camp in **Nepal**. Their stories of perseverance and optimism about their new future in the U.S. were so inspiring that they were invited to speak to a group of students at **YES! Prep**.

### Contact Info

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*PAIR is a non-profit  
501(c)(3) corporation*

### Please join us at our Spring Fundraiser!

As part of our ongoing capital campaign, please join us for food, drinks, music and fun!

**Where: Winter Street Studios, 2101 Winter Street**

**When: Wednesday, May 19, 2010; 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.**

***Silent auction begins at 6:30 p.m.***

**Tickets: \$30 per person, \$50 for two tickets**

For tickets or additional information, please call 832-647-5717

or go to [www.pairhouston.org](http://www.pairhouston.org)



### PAIR’s Increasing Impact

Upon joining PAIR’s Saturday Sessions (SS) program as a sophomore, I was immediately energized and inspired by the personalities of the kids participating in PAIR. As President of Rice PAIR during the last two years, I have collaborated with officers, volunteers, and the Board to help PAIR make an even greater impact.

Today, SS has a 1-to-1 youth-to-volunteer ratio, increasing the program’s effectiveness due to the special attention each participant receives. One “graduate” of the program now volunteers for Saturday Sessions himself!

Through the ability and motivation of our refugee participants and the hard work of PAIR members, PAIR has become a meaningful contributor to Houston’s refugee community. I am excited to see PAIR expand to new college chapters so more students can reach out to even greater numbers of refugee youth who deserve to achieve their educational goals.

*Sarita Panchang, Rice PAIR President, 2008-2010*

# Country Focus: Burma

*“Burmese authorities have perpetrated numerous documented human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, disappearances, rape, and torture, and incommunicado detentions. Internal displacement and refugee outflows of ethnic minorities are prevalent.” - UNHCR*

Burma has been under a repressive military regime since 1962. The suppression of ethnic groups and political freedoms and the economic mismanagement characterizing this regime has led to various clashes with the government and caused over two million Burmese refugees to flee the country.

## Democratic Movement

Political repression by the military junta led to the infamous “8888” event in 1988, when mass demonstrations went on for weeks in a nationwide uprising for democracy. The government suppressed the demonstrations but promised to hold elections, which were later declared void when the National League for Democracy party won in a landslide. The NLD’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has since spent much of the time under house arrest, and thousands of students and activists were forced to flee the country for speaking out against the government.

## Ethnic Groups: Karen, Chin and Other Refugees

The ethnic Karen make up a large portion of today’s Burmese refugees. Shortly after independence in 1949, the Karen National Union (KNU) tried to assert a claim for self-determination but lost their territory to the Burmese government. Though the KNU signed a ceasefire in 2004, many Karen still live in refugee camps along the Thai border.

The Chin National Front was born out of the 1988 democracy movement, when most Chin decided to join the fight for democracy. The government began to persecute the Chin, tearing down religious symbols in Chin areas, assigning Chin to forced labor and making support of the CNF a crime punishable by 10-15 years in prison. Many Chin were forced to flee the country and largely sought shelter in Malaysia.

Various other ethnic groups, including the Kachin, Mon and Shan, have been persecuted by the government and been forced to flee the country. Though most groups signed ceasefires by the late 1990s, most refugees have not been able to return home, and the refugee situation remains precarious.

## Refugee Camps and Resettlement

Thailand has long given shelter to fleeing Burmese; however, Thailand is not party to the Refugee Convention, and protections have varied over time. In 2003, Thailand forced all urban refugees to move to refugee camps after a Burmese splinter group attacked a Thai hospital.

2005: UN refugee resettlement program commenced (55,000 resettled to date)

2010: Burmese government plans to hold its first democratic elections since 1990 (date to be decided)

## Country Statistics

Population: 48 million

Ethnic groups: Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5%

## Burmese Refugee Statistics

55,000 resettled refugees

150,000 in 9 Thai border camps

228,000 in Bangladesh

61,000 in Malaysia

PAIR has been working with Burmese refugees in Houston since August 2009.

