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## Burma [Myanmar]

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	MMR04001.ZMI
<b>Date:</b>	February 26, 2004
<b>Subject:</b>	Burma (Myanmar): Information on the Chin National Front / Chin National Army
<b>From:</b>	CIS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Burma [Myanmar] / Armed resistance movements / Disadvantaged groups / Ethnic conflicts / Ethnic minorities / Political violence / Terrorism

### Query:

Has the Chin National Front (CNF)/Chin National Army (CNA) been involved in what could be considered terrorist or persecutory activities since its inception?

Does the Chin National Front or Chin National Army support or receive support from known terrorist groups within Burma, India, Bangladesh, or elsewhere or conduct extraterritorial terrorist activity in those countries?

### Response:

#### BACKGROUND

According to the group's website, the Chin National Front (CNF) was created in March 1988 (CNF). A journalist and expert on ethnic minority groups in Burma wrote in an email to the Resource Information Center (RIC) that in 1987, Chin nationalists took the decision to join an armed coalition against Burma's central government and fight for more autonomy for the various ethnic minority groups represented by the coalition. In 1988, many young Chin fled to the Burma-India border due to pro-democracy unrest in Burma, and some joined the CNF (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). A Thailand-based expert on Burma who writes for JANE'S INTELLIGENCE REVIEW and the FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW,

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among others, wrote in an email to the RIC that at first the CNF had no army, but in November 1988 the CNF created the Chin National Army (CNA) (Expert 24 Feb 2004). A 2002 Human Rights Watch report describes the CNA as being about "500 strong" (HRW 2002).

Since 1989, the CNF has been a member of Burma's National Democratic Front (NDF), which is made up exclusively of non-Burman ethnic armed opposition groups (CALD, CNFa). The CNF also represents the Chin people in the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), a UN-styled organization based in Hawaii that includes nations and peoples not represented in the UN (CNFa, UNPO). On its website, the CNF states that the group has testified before the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) (CNFb).

While other ethnic-based armed movements have signed peace deals with the Burmese government, the CNF/CNA have not, and sporadic fighting in Chin state continues (U.S. DOS/INR 13 Feb 2004, Journalist 25 Feb 2004). The journalist contacted by the RIC states that there is a great deal of resultant displacement among the local Chin population, many of whom have fled to India, Malaysia, Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere. The journalist also says that the trend toward ceasefires between ethnic opposition forces and the Burmese government appears to be increasing, although "relations between the government and armed groups is...subject to flux" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). He points out that "...the CNF is one of only four main forces not to have ceasefires [with the government], but two of these—the Karen National Union and Karenni National Progressive Party—are having talks with the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council, or Government of Burma] at present, and it is thought likely that both will agree [to] terms during the year. In 2004, the SPDC appears very keen to try and achieve as much peace as possible, prior to pushing ahead with a recently-announced roadmap for political reform" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

#### INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT (CNF) / CHIN NATIONAL ARMY (CNA) IN WHAT COULD BE CONSIDERED TERRORIST OR PERSECUTORY ACTIVITIES

A U.S. Department of State representative told the RIC in a telephone interview that there have been "unsubstantiated allegations of drug and arms trafficking by the CNA" but that the State Department does not have information suggesting that the CNF or CNA have been involved in terrorist activities or in abuses against civilians on any large or systematic scale (U.S. DOS/INR 13 Feb 2004).

The journalist contacted by the RIC stated in his email that "[g]enerally, [the CNA] does not control large amounts of territory, and its main targets have been military since its inception. CNF leaders claim that such tactics have been employed to prevent conflict in civilian areas as well as the targeting of the civilian population in revenge

tactics" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

A U.S.-based Burma expert told the RIC in an email that the CNF is generally viewed as a "benign and unifying force" among the Chin, but cautions that the Chin are a "very heterogeneous" group and that there are some who believe that the CNF has brought trouble to the Chin by attracting more Burmese government forces to the Chin state (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004). The expert states that "[o]ne rarely hears of specific abuses by CNF/CNA personnel, but such abuses usually seem to involve extortion— excessive tax collection from villagers, and interference with cross-border trade. The taxation may be part of CNF/CNA policy, but the abuse of civilians is certainly not, and is a divergence from discipline by individual soldiers" (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004). The expert further indicates that "[t]he CNA currently operates largely as an intelligence-gathering underground resistance, with limited ambush-type attacks against Burma Army forces" (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004). The expert reports finding "widespread" support for the CNF/CNA, "particularly among young, educated Chins, who often furnish non-military support and information to the CNF/CNA or distribute CNF printed materials, and are at severe risk for that reason" (U.S. Expert 20 Feb 2004).

The journalist contacted by the RIC states that "[i]t is difficult to estimate how much popular support the CNF enjoys" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). Like the U.S.-based expert, the journalist points out that the local Chin population chafes at the military response the CNA's armed struggle has invited from the Burmese government and feels that "the cycle of violence...has proven difficult to stop" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

In 1999, the Burmese government accused the CNF of killing a Buddhist monk on the Burma-India border— a charge the CNF denied (BurmaNet News 14 Oct 1999). Responding to allegations that civilians had been killed by CNA landmines or been shot by CNA fighters, a CNA colonel stated in an interview with CHINLAND GUARDIAN that any such incidents would have been accidents and that the CNA does not target civilians. The colonel did admit that the CNA had closed border trade between India and Burma. He also said that CNA policy is to discipline any soldiers who may commit "mistakes" or "misbehave" (CHINLAND GUARDIAN 20 Jan 2003).

**SUPPORT BY THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT (CNF) / CHIN NATIONAL ARMY (CNA)  
FOR KNOWN TERRORIST GROUPS IN BURMA, INDIA, BANGLADESH, OR  
ELSEWHERE, OR SUPPORT FOR THE CNF / CNA BY TERRORIST GROUPS**

The journalist contacted by the RIC states in his email that "in general, the CNF struggle is home-grown" (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). The Thailand-based expert's email to the RIC says that he is unaware of contacts between the CNF/CNA and militant groups in India or Bangladesh (Expert 24 Feb 2004). Both reference ties between the CNF/CNA and the Mizos of India, who are closely ethnically related to the Chin, and are located just across the border from Chin state (Journalist 25 Feb 2004, Expert 24 Feb 2004).

**CONDUCT OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY BY THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT (CNF) / CHIN NATIONAL ARMY (CNA) OUTSIDE OF BURMA**

The journalist contacted by the RIC states in his email that "the CNF has always been careful to focus on Burma, and its pre-eminent relations have been with such fronts as the ethnic National Democratic Front (NDF) and the National Council Union of Burma, which includes such pro-democracy groups as the National Coalition Government Union of Burma that maintains an office in Washington D.C." (Journalist 25 Feb 2004). He also notes that while the current trend is toward cease-fire agreements between opposition groups and the Burmese government, "armed ethnic politics" have been a regular feature in Burma's political context over the past few decades and the authority of these groups has been recognized not only by the Burmese government but by the UN and other members of the international community (Journalist 25 Feb 2004).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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