Burmsese Refugee Students Assisted Through Special IU Preacademic/ESL Program

On September 29, during one of the regular weekly evening meetings of the Burmsese Refugee Scholarship Program, group members celebrated the recent birthdays of four Program participants: scholarship grantees Tun Myint and Thet Naing (standing), Associate Coordinator Paul Haakenson, and Justin, three-year old son of scholarship grantees Saw Wah Ler and New May Paw.

Since their arrival in the United States from Thailand on June 17, a group of eleven Burmsese student refugees have been participants in a U.S. Information Agency (USIA) program of preacademic orientation and ESL training at IU-Bloomington. The USIA Burmsese Refugee Scholarship Program, inaugurated in 1991, is administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE). Under contract with IIE, Indiana University's Office of International Services (OIS) and the Center for English Language Training (CELT) jointly administer the Burmsese Refugee Scholarship Program, which has the responsibility for placing these Burmsese students at U.S. institutions of higher education offering them opportunities to obtain an appropriate degree or vocationnal training experience after completing their IU course.

Having received a warm welcome to Indiana, the student refugees from Burma quickly adjusted to the Bloomington campus and community environment. IU Burmsese Student Program Associate Coordinator Paul Haakenson, who worked closely with them over the summer, comments that it is "especially heartening to assist the eager minds of these Burmsese students. They have had a difficult past, but look forward to a bright future."

Along with hundreds of their fellow students who fled Burma in 1988 following pro-democracy demonstrations that had ended with a bloody crackdown by the military junta that has controlled the country for three decades, the young men and women being assisted through the IU Burmsese Student Program sought refuge in Thailand. There was a period of resistance fighting along the Thai-Burma border, during which many of them fell ill from malnutrition and malaria. Eventually, all of them succeeded in getting to Bangkok, where they were able to obtain some aid from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office and various non-governmental volunteer agencies. Their legal status nevertheless remained insecure, for the Thai government declined to accord them refugee status and sought to forcibly return them to Burma. While awaiting an opportunity to continue their education in the United States, Canada, or Australia, the students lived in constant danger of arrest.

They also worked hard to improve their English language skills through part-time study at local institutions, as well as jobs in businesses and service agencies. Through these efforts and on the basis of their performance on various achievement tests, they were selected for grants under the USIA Burmsese Refugee Scholarship Program which will fund study toward a bachelor's or master's degree in the United States.
In preparation for the students' June 17 arrival, the Director of the Office of International Services (OIS), Dean Kenneth Rogers, along with the Senior Coordinator of the Burmese Student Program, Joyce Hertko, and Associate Coordinator Paul Haakenson consulted authorities on refugees in Thailand as well as Burma scholars and key personnel in community service agencies. Discussions were also held with campus service units, including the Health Center and the Career Development Center.

During the course of the intensive pre-academic training program, the Burmese students have had little time for activities other than homework. However, OIS held a banquet to celebrate the students' successful completion of their first session of English training. The training program has also included an excursion to the Indianapolis Zoo, attendance at the musical Carousel, and a trip to Fort Wayne.

The Office of International Services has recently learned of other Burmese refugees and student refugees living elsewhere in Indiana, with a large group of Burmese in Fort Wayne and smaller groups living in Indianapolis and West Lafayette. Most of these Burmese refugees were brought to the U.S. under the sponsorship of the Church World Service, an organization which specializes in assisting refugees. The student refugees in Fort Wayne are currently working at odd jobs, with some taking evening classes at IUPU-FW when possible. Several of these students hope to become full-time students, and one student has already begun English training on the Bloomington campus this past summer.

A common thread found to unite all these Burmese students is their hopes for true democracy in Burma and for their eventual return to assist in the rebuilding of their country after 30 years of military rule. For these student refugees, their studies in the United States have the twofold purpose of learning marketable skills for employment in the U.S. and of gaining the knowledge and technological expertise which will eventually be required to help guide Burma into the future. Desired areas of study for the twelve program participants include rural development, social work, medicine, geology, public administration, and international relations.

OIS has recently learned that additional Burmese students may be coming to participate in their pre-academic training program in 1994. Senior Coordinator Hertko observes that this recent development reflects positively on the efforts of the entire IU-B staff members involved in the program.

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**Anti-Apartheid Leader Named as Wells Professor**

The Honorable Helen Suzman, a member of the South African Parliament for more than thirty years and one of the country's most outspoken opponents of apartheid, has been selected as Indiana University's first Wells Professor—a professorship sponsored by the Class of 1941 and created to honor IU Chancellor Herman B Wells. Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, Mrs. Suzman's courage, political skills, and leadership have been recognized with such awards as the United Nations Award of the International League for Human Rights and the American Liberties Medallion, and in 1989 she was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. Mrs. Suzman was the 1992 commencement speaker at IU-Bloomington, receiving an honorary degree on that occasion. Her autobiography, Helen Suzman in No Uncertain Terms, will be published in November by Alfred A. Knopf.

For 3 weeks during October and November, Mrs. Suzman will be a guest lecturer at IU-B for the seminar “Power, Politics, and Ethics: The South African Example,” an 8-week course co-sponsored by the Honors Division, the Wells Scholar Program, and the African Studies Program. She will present two public Tuesday evening lectures at 7 pm in Ernie Pyle Hall 220—“Women in the New South Africa” on October 19 and “South Africa in Transition” on November 2.

**IUPUI—Universidad de Costa Rica Exchange Flourishes**

An exchange agreement between Indiana University and Universidad de Costa Rica, established in 1990, has opened foreign study opportunities for IUPUI students. According to the agreement, Universidad de Costa Rica provides facilitative services and tuition to as many as five IUPUI students for one or two semesters, while IUPUI provides partial scholarships to these students as well as to a faculty member from Universidad de Costa Rica for graduate study at IUPUI.

Since 1990, thirteen IUPUI students have enrolled at Universidad de Costa Rica—three students for one semester and ten for a full academic year. In addition, five IUPUI students are currently preparing for departure to Costa Rica in late January, 1994. Through this exchange, one Universidad de Costa Rica undergraduate has spent a year at IUPUI, and Dr. Madeline Howard of the Faculty of Dentistry at Universidad de Costa Rica will complete a Master's in Dental Diagnostic Studies at Indiana University this year.

The agreement has also supported a number of short-term faculty exchanges between Universidad de Costa Rica in San Jose and the Indiana University campuses in Indianapolis and Bloomington.