

Chin National Front / Chin National Army

For more than a decade, soldiers have tried to coerce ethnic Chins, who are mainly Christian, to convert to the country's majority Buddhist faith and otherwise "Burmanize" the population of Chin Division, located on the western border with India.

The Chin National Front (CNF) was created in March 1988. 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. At first the CNF had no army, but in November 1988 the CNF created the Chin National Army (CNA). A 2002 Human Rights Watch report describes the CNA as being about "500 strong". 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. 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 . On its website, the CNF states that the group has testified before the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. 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 continued as of early 2004. There is a great deal of resultant displacement among the local Chin population, many of whom have fled to India, Malaysia, Canada, the US, and elsewhere. The trend toward ceasefires between ethnic opposition forces and the Burmese government appeared to be increasing, although relations between the government and armed groups is subject to flux. The CNF was 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— were having [talks](#) with the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council, or Government of Burma]. In 2004, the SPDC appeared very keen to try and achieve as much peace as possible, prior to pushing ahead with a roadmap for political reform. There have been unsubstantiated allegations of drug and arms trafficking by the CNA, but the US 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. Generally, 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. The CNF is generally viewed as a benign and unifying force among the Chin, but 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. One 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. The CNA currently operates largely as an intelligence-gathering underground resistance, with limited ambush-type attacks against Burma Army forces. There is 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. It is difficult to estimate how much popular support the CNF enjoys. 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. In 1999, the Burmese government accused the CNF of killing a Buddhist monk on the Burma-India border— a charge the CNF denied. 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 CNA had closed border trade between India and Burma. CNA policy is to discipline any soldiers who may commit "mistakes" or "misbehave". In general, the CNF struggle is home-grown. There is no indication of contacts between the CNF/CNA and militant groups in India or Bangladesh. There are 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. 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 DC. 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.

Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/chin.htm>