

people call these taxes war funds. If the parents did not need to pay taxes they could support their children to go school instead.

“Even though we do not have a good job to make money for our family we could be in a comfortable life if we did not need to pay tax. But now we need to pay numerous taxes to each armed groups every year. Sometimes I feel that we are feeding these armed groups instead of supporting our children to send them to school. Because we have to pay whatever they demand from us, not only food, money and our labor, but also even our children have to go to them to be their soldier.”²⁷⁶

Ceasefire groups set up the law for the villages. Every household in this region has to pay tax to them, if they evade tax or refuse they have to send their children to armed-groups. They can also seize properties such as farmland, houses and cattle.

“We can not live in this region if one person from our family is not involved in armed group as a soldier. If not, they demand our children three times. After that they confiscate our properties. Although we do not want to be here the reason that we are in this village is that we do not have any idea to move somewhere else. As a result we are feeding four armed groups instead of sending our children to school regularly.”²⁷⁷

If there was no taxation in this region, the children could go to school. Parents have to expend their money on armed-groups instead of sending their children to school.

Parental Attitudes

According to the Convention of the Rights of the Child Article 18, the government has responsibilities to support the parent to send their children to school, and the parent has a responsibility to send their children to school regularly.²⁷⁸ Most parents from this region are not encouraging education for their children. In the parent’s thinking, the parent is satisfied if the children can farm for the family. The parents think doing farm work to get food is better than go to school for their children. They know if they send their children to school they will have to spend a lot of money for each year.

²⁷⁶ Interview 7.

²⁷⁷ Interview 7.

²⁷⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 18.

Some parents said that if their children can write and read it is enough for their life. They do not know that it is in their child's best interest to send them to school. The parents only focus on current problems such as how to get food and money for the family. They do not send their children to school when the child is getting strong enough to do farm work. If the children drop out school so early in school age, they will not know the value of education. When they have children they will also not encourage their children's education. This lack of education continues through the generations.

Drug Abuse

The United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) and the military had reduced the opium growth 73 percent in 2002. Although Burma has managed to reduce opium cultivation, widespread poverty, porous borders, limited control over the border areas and lawlessness all stimulate a thriving unrecorded cross-border economy.²⁷⁹ In 2002 the opium ban in the region had a significantly detrimental effect on the local economy and well being of the local population. Drug producers bribe armed-groups and the military to produce heroin and methamphetamines in this region. The military and armed-group's officers are getting a lot of money from these drug producers and distributors. Drug issues are the most difficult to solve for the people from this region and for their local leader. A lot of families have spread out and divorced due to heroin. The children are becoming the real drug victims in the families.

Since 2002 there have been no more opium plantations in the region. In last decade, many business- men based in this region have grown opium and produced heroin. After 2002 the SPDC and ceasefire groups arrested a lot of individual drug traders and producers. But some economic groups who cooperate with the ceasefire groups and the SPDC were still producing heroin until 2005. After 2005 there has been no more heroin production. However, there are more heroin users than before the heroin producers left. Ceasefire groups provide security for the drug producers to trade drugs and to produce. So it's very difficult to ban absolutely all drug trading. One youth said that the military allowed drugs in his village:

"We do not notice that the military uses drugs as a weapon to make ethnic people weak. But, we all know well why the military does not ban both drug use and distribution in this village. There are more than 30 people using drugs regularly."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ 'Poisoned Flowers', page 12.

²⁸⁰ Interview 10.

The villages' head and the women organizations placed a ban on drugs and arrested the drug distributors. They try to send the drug sellers to the police but the drug sellers bribe the military commanders from ka la ya 45 and 312 (Infantry Battalion). The military commander ordered the women leaders to release the drug sellers.

"We have experience. The women's organization of this village organized people to arrest the drug sellers because drug problem is affects women's daily life. First they tried to send the drug sellers but the military commander and militia ordered us to release their people."²⁸¹

Some children's parents are using drugs. If their parent does not have the money for drugs, the children have to make money for their father instead of going school. Moreover, many children drop out of school due to their parent's addiction to drugs. If one person is using drugs in the family, the first victim of drugs is the children and women. The government has a responsibility to take action on drug sellers but they ignore this issue. We can see very clearly that the military has pushed the ethnic people towards drug use so that they would lose power. The military does not care how about how children lack education in the region. The military creates ways for the ethnic children to have less opportunity to get education.

Conclusion

This report explained how children are suffering from a lack of access to education in the region. The children's parents have to spend money for taxes instead of sending their children to school. Additionally, despite that parents are already struggling to find food for their families, they have to go do forced labor and public work twice a month. If parents cannot earn enough money for their children's schooling, the children have to drop out of school. Making matters worse, parents are working in the military camp instead of working in the fields to get food for their family and to send their children to school. If the parent is not able to get food and not able to work for the family, the children will not be able to go school. The parents cannot afford to buy school supplies for their children.

When children are as young as nine or ten years old, the parents worry about their children being taken for conscription. The armed-groups demand the children

²⁸¹ Interview 13.

from the parents to provide recruitment for child soldiers. The military forces people to work for their camps and they use the peoples' properties as they like. All of this contributes the children's lack of education in the region.

The government has a responsibility to provide free education for primary school aged children. The government had failed their responsibility to educate the youth. There are not enough teachers, not enough classrooms and there are not high enough teacher salaries. The government works against the best interest of the country. Education should always be promoted: There must be education for all the children in all areas of the country, including remote ones.

Recommendations

To the SPDC and ceasefire groups:

- Stop using forced labor.
- Stop the plural ruling system.
- Stop practicing recruitment of youth under eighteen.
- Provide enough teachers and give them adequate salaries.
- To promote a permanent middle school.
- Protect Human Rights.
- Protect the Rights of the Child.

To the International Community:

- Investigate human rights abuses by both the SPDC and ceasefire groups.
- Push the government to stop abusing child's rights.
- Push the government to stop using forced labor.
- Push ceasefire groups to stop using child soldiers.

To the teachers of Burma:

- Do not discriminate against ethnic children.
- Respect the hours of school and teach a full day.

To parents in Burma:

- Send all children under eighteen to school.
- Do not force children to drop out school.
- Give children time to study.
- Plan the children's future.
- Encourage the children to go school.

The Impact of the UN Resettlement Program for Karenni People in Camps #1 and #2 on the Thai-Burma Border

By Mar Ry

Thai-Burma Border Map of the Karenni Refugee Camps





Life in Karenni refugee camps. (Photo by Mar Ry).

Introduction

The UN resettlement program is good for those who leave. The problems, however, are for those who remain in the camp. Because of the UN resettlement program or initiative the current situation in the camp is awful. The program has had a severe impact on camp management and services. The departure of skilled, educated and experienced camp program and service providers has generated concern about how best to mitigate the negative impacts on service delivery to the remaining camp population.

Thailand is one of the worst places for refugees in the world.²⁸² There are two Karenni refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border with a total population of 23,838.²⁸³ The Karenni refugee camp 1 is located in Mae Hong Son territory and Karenni refugee camp 2 is located in Khum Yum territory. It is 4 or 5 KM away from Thai-Burma border. Karenni refugees sheltering on the Thai-Burma border moved there in search of safer accommodation.

All the Karenni refugees in Thailand are considered illegal immigrants by the Thai authorities and are vulnerable to arrest and deportation at any time if they are outside the camps. For these reasons, the freedom of movement for the refugees is very restricted. They cannot leave but there are no opportunities for most people inside the camp. Some of the Karenni refugees have lived in the camp for more than 20 years. Moreover, they have no hope to go back to Burma because human rights abuses are continuing and the political situation in Burma is still unstable.

²⁸² Bangkok Post ('Thailand ranked as one of the worst places'), 20 June 2008.

²⁸³ Karenni Refugee Main Committee (pamphlet).

According to the UNHCR, there are three durable solutions for refugees: repatriation, integration, and resettlement.²⁸⁴ It is not possible for Karenni refugees to be repatriated in Burma due to civil war and human rights abuses. They cannot integrate and become citizens of Thailand as the Thai authority has not signed or ratified the convention related to the refugees. Thailand refuses to recognize their status and will not allow them to stay. The third option is third country resettlement. Since 2005, with the agreement of the Thai government, the UNHCR started to resettle Karenni refugees in some Western countries. The process is happening very fast and many Karenni refugees are excited to get a new life and renewed hope in third countries. The ongoing resettlement from camps in Thailand is giving Karenni refugees a chance at a durable solution for the first time.

This report proceeds as follows: The first part explains the Karenni refugee background and current the situation in camp. The second part outlines what the UN program is and how it affects Karenni society. The third part examines who has responsibility for the Karenni refugees. Field work for this report was done in Karenni refugee camps 1 and 2 along the Thai-Burma border in the Mae Hong Son province. The information was collected through individual interview with UNHCR representative, camp leaders, youth, and local people and Karenni people who are already resettled in third countries. Altogether Thirty people were interviewed for this report.

Background

The Karenni State is located in Eastern Burma. Since the Burmese military regime occupied it in 1948, the Karenni people have been fighting to regain their lost independence. As a result more than 20,000 Karenni people have fled to neighboring Thailand where they live as refugees in the northwestern Mae Hong Son Province. They currently live in two refugee camps: Camp No. 1 and No. 2#.

For more than 20 years, Karenni refugees from Burma have been fleeing to Thailand to seek refuge from the practices of human rights abuse, forced labor, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and extrajudicial killing carried out by the authoritarian regime in Burma. Some of the refugees have lived in the camp for more than 20 years. Twenty years is a long time in anyone's life. It is a very long time to be a refugee. There is nothing to celebrate when tens of thousands people have had their lives uprooted and still face a very uncertain future.

²⁸⁴ Interview with UNHCR representative (Interview 10).



Karenni refugee camp. (Photo by Mar Ry).

Refugee camps are not natural place to live. Basic human rights and freedoms are not guaranteed there. The Karenni people cannot study, work or travel outside the camp. Refugees have lost everything in their homeland and carry sad and painful memories. Camp life is tedious and standard of living in is very basic indeed. And yet, for over decades refugees from Burma have managed to live in dignity and hope along this border. They have maintained their communities; they have managed their own affairs and take care of each other. Refugees build all their houses and public building in the camps, dig all the ditches and water wells, teach in the schools, serve as nurses, health workers and home visitors. With a limited space and few resources the refugee do more than survive - they live. Therefore, many people contribute the lives of the refugees.

In the camps there are camp committees, section leader's women and other community organizations who take on the huge responsibilities for the refugees, usually support or appreciation. And then there are teachers, health workers, home visitors, security patrols and for TBBC storekeepers and distribution teams how quietly and responsible carry out their duties month in, month out, year out also for very little reward.

As the resettlement program gathers momentum and as people prepare to depart for a new life in third countries — for many people resettlement offer renew hope,

opportunities and a permanent solution away from prolong encampment. A whole new generation has grown up confined within camps and people are naturally hopeful and curious about the opportunities for life in third country.

There are some reasons why Karenni refugees are resettling. One reason is at present camp residents are restricted in their movements. Another reason why Karenni youth want to resettle is because they want to gain more educational opportunities. Other people want to resettle because they want to be free of the difficult situation in the refugee camps and in Burma. As the UNHCR reminds the Karenni refugees in its information brochure for refugees, resettlement is a permanent solution.

The UNHCR Resettlement Program

A refugee, as defined by the refugee is a person who is outside of and unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of the home country because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. They are forced to leave suddenly and therefore have few possessions.



An American representative explains the UN resettlement program to Karenni people. (Photo by Mar Ry).

The refugee resettlement program is a federally-funded program that provides cash assistance, medical assistance, health screening, and social services to refugees. Resettlement is one of three durable solutions for refugees:

"Our mission is to help refugee to not be refugees forever. Being a refugee should be a temporary phase of their life. Traditionally, UNHCR puts forward three ways to help them to get normal life. Firstly is repatriation to their country of origin if conditions improve. The second is integration in the country of first asylum"²⁸⁵

- UNHCR Representative to Thailand.

The UNHCR is the only agency with the specific mandate to protect refugees and help resolve refugee problems worldwide. When people are forced to flee because of war or prosecution, they turn to UNHCR for immediate assistance. If necessary, they help refugees settle in another country where they can start a new life. Resettlement in this context means transferring a refugee from his or her country of asylum to another country that has agreed to admit that person, to grant them long-term residence rights and the opportunity to become naturalized citizens.²⁸⁶ Resettlement is usually in an industrialized country with the resources to provide the requisite support to ease the transition to a new country.

"The UNHCR helps refugee people to gain more life guarantee in other countries. The UNHCR tries do the best thing for refugee people."²⁸⁷ - Karenni Youth

The resettlement program was introduced into Karenni refugee camp 1 and 2 in 2005. In April 2006, Karenni refugees began being resettled in New Zealand and Finland. In 2006 to 2008, 870 Karenni refugees resettled to New Zealand, Finland, Australia, Sweden, Norway, Canada and the USA. Karenni people will continue to resettle in Australia and Finland. The following chart shows the resettlement of Karenni refugees from camps 1 and 2 between 2008 and 2008:

No.	Country	< 5	>5	Total
1	New Zealand	9	65	74
2	Australia	19	162	181
3	Canada	0	8	8
4	Sweden	10	40	50
5	Finland	84	438	522
6	American	3	23	26
7	Norway	3	6	9
	All total	128	742	870

*The update of resettlement in camp 1 and 2 as of 20/3/ 2008.*²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Interview 10, UNHCR representative.

²⁸⁶ 'Green Voices of Youth' (2007), ERI.

²⁸⁷ Interview 3 (Karenni youth).

²⁸⁸ Karenni Refugee Main Committee, pamphlet.

Impacts of the Resettlement Program

A whole new generation has grown up confined within camps and people are naturally hopeful and curious about the opportunities for life in a third country. Some people have to live in the camp over 20 years. They lived in crowded houses and ate only what NGOs supported for the refugees.

"The UN resettlement program is good for youth to continue their education. Living in the camp difficult and you cannot go out side the camp. There are only two camps but it is difficult to communicate with each other. The UN resettlement program is the best for youth to look forward and to go outside the camp."²⁸⁹

- Karenni Youth

The resettlement program is a door to see the world and change refugee lives. It is a good chance for the youth to gain more education opportunities and have access to higher education. People will have more security and life guaranteed for their future. The resettlement program is now gathering momentum as thousands of



Karenni refugees interested in the UN resettlement program. (Photo by Mar Ry).

²⁸⁹ Interview 18, youth in Karenni Refugee Camp 2.

refugees apply for resettlement and prepare to depart for a completely new life in third countries. They can create what they want and have freedom of movement.

“After the UN resettlement program people minds are changed and have raring to go. And start to know how to find their best way and how to plan their future life. Their minds are become wide and excited to change their thought.”²⁹⁰

- Parent in Karenni Camp

Karenni refugee people in the camp are like birds in a cage. They cannot go outside the camp and are unaware of the reality of the outside world. Therefore, a resettled life is better for them now. This is an exciting opportunity for those individuals and families selected. They have more human rights in third countries. The resettlement is helping to resolve the overall refugee predicament.

Refugees go to third countries with the realistic prospect of naturalization as citizens of that country. Resettlement offers safety, security, opportunity, new skills, schooling and basic human rights protection.”²⁹¹

- UNHCR Representative to Thailand.

Resettlement to a third country is one of the solutions for Karenni refugees. The resettlement provides people with hope for a new life.

Negative Impacts on Those Remaining

The UN resettlement program affects Karenni society both positively and negatively. Since the UN resettlement program was introduced into the Karenni refugee camp in 2005, with the agreement of the Thai government, the UNHCR started to resettle Karenni refugee camps a long Thai-Burma border to some western countries. The process is happening very fast and many Karenni refugees are very excited to go and prepare to depart for a new life and renewed hope in third countries.

Before resettlement became an option on the border- the Karenni refugees had a long-standing dream of returning home. But the event of resettlement marks a break from this dream.

²⁹⁰ Interview 8, parent who wants to resettle.

²⁹¹ Interview 10, UNHCR representative.

The Thai government has allowed for the resettlement of Karenni refugees, giving them a chance at a durable solution for the first time. But while resettlement is a positive development for those chosen, there remains concern for the fate of those who have not yet been resettled. Most of people in the Karenni refugee camps are concerned about what will happen for them.

Resettlement has led to a disproportionate number of skilled workers leaving certain camps. The largest group to leave is teachers, followed by health workers and those in leadership roles. International and local NGOs working in the camp have found it difficult to replace staff, especially medics and teachers.

Most of people in the camp want to resettle and constantly discuss the UN resettlement program. The youth especially want to resettle as they cannot even leave the camp. The only way they see that they can be more free is through resettlement. Most of youth in the camp see renewed hope, opportunities and a permanent solution away from prolonged encampment. Examples of youth opinions are:

"I am interested to go because nothing to change for me to stay in the camp. I have been in refugee camp over 15 years also can not go back. I do not have life guarantee and no rights in the camp."²⁹²

- Karenni Youth

"After the UN resettlement program especially youth did not want to study and most of the services interesting to resettle. The process makes people excited and most service less responsibility for their community. I also have unstable situation and I sign out from teacher."²⁹³

- Karenni Youth

Another negative impact of the resettlement program is a break down in the social fabric of the community, breakdown of the cohesion of family life. Some couples have asked for divorced papers. Some couples did not have problems or conflicts before the program started, but now they are in conflict. According to the UNHCR, the situation in camp is unstable. Our leaders also did not have decision making and no one interfere who want to apply and resettle in third countries.

²⁹² Interview 4, youth in Karenni Refugee Camp 1.

²⁹³ Interview 3.

Today a new mood of resettlement fever pervades the camps, generating hope and anticipation but also concerns about separation from community and homeland. Since the Burmese military regime occupied it in 1948, the Karenni people have been fighting to regain their lost independence. The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) do not want to give up on their struggle. If the people are resettled internationally then it maybe difficult to maintain solidarity against the SPDC. People fear for the worst:

"I have concerned if most people left, people who remain in the camp what will happen for us? Will force us to go back or stay in Thailand. Have many concern and depression."²⁹⁴

- Parent Remaining in Camp

"We are remaining in the camp, we have many concern about our security, our livelihood. What will happen and people will continue support us or not? I do know not anything about the situation but I have many concerns."²⁹⁵

- Parent Remaining in the Camp

Educational Impact

"The UN resettlement programs process impacts the youth, students, and teachers. Some students have become less interested in studying and most teachers have hoped to resettle including me. The result is an unstable situation for education."²⁹⁶

- Karenni High School Teacher

The UN resettlement program has in fact worsened education in the camp. Some of the experienced teachers and educators left, so new teachers are needed. There are thousand of students in the Karenni refugee camps. There are not enough teachers for students. It is difficult to replace the teachers because the salary of teacher in the camp is very low. Even if a replacement teachers, many of them may not stay for long before they apply for resettlement.²⁹⁷

The loss of teachers also has to impact on the students. Some new teachers do not have teaching experience and have not finished University. Some students are less interested to study and also some of parents are not encouraging their children to

²⁹⁴ Interview 20, parent.

²⁹⁵ Interview 26, parent.

²⁹⁶ Interview 6, high school teacher in Camp 1.

²⁹⁷ Interview 5, Secretary, Karenni Refugee Camp 1.

study. Instead, they focus only on resettlement. These are the problems that the resettlement program creates in the education system for the community that is left behind.

"I see some of students had already interviewed and finished medical checking but they do not know yet when will resettle in third countries. Some students have thought and are interested to resettle so they are not interesting to study anymore in the current situation. They are just waiting for the date to go in third countries."²⁹⁸

Some of students have already interviewed and medical checking but they do not know when they will go. One of the students who are waiting for to go said the following quote:

"I had already interviewed and finished to medical checking but I do not know exactly when will go. I am so embarrassed and excited. In my thought I only know have to resettle in third country."²⁹⁹

- Karenni Youth

Health Impact

Resettlement also presents other dilemmas, such as the short and intermediate impacts on the remaining camp populations. The impact of the departure of disproportionate numbers of the most educated skilled and experienced staff from camp services, programs and leadership. All stakeholders report concerns about the loss of these skilled staff, especially from the key sectors of health. Half of the medics are scheduled to depart for resettlement, presenting short-term problems for health programs struggling to keep up with training of replacements as well as longer-term concerns about finding sufficient staff from an already limited pool of the educated and skilled camp population.³⁰⁰

"Health services workers are interest to apply because they will likely be chosen. Some other services are less interest to work. Those with good experience for work really want to go. I am concerned that if we have one kind of disease come in our community, we do not have enough experienced medics to deal with the situation."³⁰¹

- Health Worker

²⁹⁸ Interview 17, teacher, Camp 2.

²⁹⁹ Interview 19, youth in Camp 2 with access to resettlement.

³⁰⁰ 'In the shadows of the Thai Burma Border: East Asia's Foremost Refugee Crisis'.

³⁰¹ Interview 14.

Some of medics and experience service providers have already resettled. The proportion of educated workers in the camps is so small that this is expected to have a major impact on camp management, community services and assistance projects supported by NGOs. International and local NGOs working in the camps have found it difficult to replace staff, especially medics and nurses.

"Before the UN resettlement program in our health department we had policy, if a medic have finished the medical training, should work in community five years. But now we can not control them any more. We change the policy if finished training, have to work two years. We try to explain them to understand our current situation. We request them to do the best until they left."³⁰²

- Health Care Coordinator

Some community-based organizations (CBOs) in the camp maintain that resettling countries have initiated little dialogue with them, which has created misgivings about the resettlement process. Also our leaders in the camp do not have decision making for this process and can not forbid who want to resettle.

Interference by Thai Government

Despite the good intentions of the resettlement program, the Thai authority delays and interferes with those who want to resettle in third countries. The authorities refused to let Kayah (long neck) to resettle in third countries. Because the long necks are very popular among tourist and have not lived in the largely sealed off refugee camps, a fact the Thai authorities are now using to suggest they are economic refugees rather than political ones. Some of lady took off their coils in anger. Some people want to resettle including their ring. They don't want to take off that is their culture. Long Neck (Kayah) women who take off coils said the following:

"When I stay here in the village, they make money from tourists, and I don't like that. I don't want to earn money from other people. I want to get my own education, work by myself and own by myself. I take off my rings so they will let me go to third country."³⁰³

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Thailand 'Long Neck' women (Advertisement, 12 January 2008).

The Thai government interferes with people confirmed for resettlement by the UNHCR as well. Some of families have been approved but the Thai authorities do not permit them.

May 29, 2008 is the last day of my visa to arrive. Some of my friend have already left. We remain four families including my family. I have to leave on December 2007 or January 2008 because of that reason, but I have not left. I have to resettle in Australia. I started to apply the UN resettlement program in 2006. I have to wait over two years to resettle until now."³⁰⁴

- Family Accepted for Resettlement

Why the Thai authority not allow some people to resettle because of technical registration matters. Some people have registered with the UN as living in camp 2 but they have been living in camp 1#. So they denied them resettlement.

"I got the news and accept the letter from the UNHCR and MOI (Ministry of the Interior). On May 15, 2007 is the date to go. But the Thai authority did not sign for me. I felt so upset and got depressed. They informed me that I am registered in camp #2. Because of that they do not allow my family to go. And than I request back to stay in camp 2 and the UN said they will try for me. But I have waited one year with no information. When knew the date I have to go, I sold all my properties and gave other. What should I do? Everything is gone. No home."³⁰⁵

Another reason is the case happened on December 16, 2007 the Thai authorities and local people in camp 1 had conflict each other. One of Karenni students was killed by the Thai authorities. Some students became angry and destroyed the Thai authority camp. The Thai authorities want to know who participated and lead the problems. They do not allow the people to resettle and to go outside the camp. Some people scheduled for resettlement must now wait. The UNHCR is not independent of the Thai Authority, requiring permission to do anything.

In fact, most countries still want to keep their doors open to Karenni refugees, but the Thai authorities are increasingly limiting the opportunities for the Karenni. The Thai authorities should allow for resettlement.

³⁰⁴ Interview 2, a family who has access to resettlement.

³⁰⁵ Interview 9, a family who has access to resettlement.

"The Thai authority should not forbid us to resettle. They do not want refugee to stay their country any more so should give refugee chance to resettle in other countries. Thai authority should have humanitarian."³⁰⁶

Some people who love their country they do not want to resettle in other countries and do not want to stay in Thailand the whole life. But they can not go back in Burma because the political situation is unstable. So they do not know exactly what should do and what will happen for them in the future. The leadership is gone and the hope for Karenni repatriation is dispersing.

"Because of the UN resettlement program, we can not promote repatriation as a goal. Because we got short time to lobby the public and cannot forbid the people who want to resettle. We face problems to go back in Burma and not easy to continue stay in Thailand."³⁰⁷

Responsibility for Refugees

SPDC

The human rights abuses by the SPDC are the main cause of refugees fleeing Burma. The SPDC do not protect, promote or fulfill the human rights of the ethnic group. The SPDC forces people to relocate. The result is a refugee flow to other countries. The failure of the SPDC causes the problems that Thailand and the international community must now deal with. Amnesty International notes:

"The rights of refugees and basic human rights are inextricably linked. Today's human rights abuses are tomorrow's refugee movements."³⁰⁸

Thai Government Obligations

Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Refugee convention and does not recognize the status of refugees. As a result, asylum seekers are not distinguished from other immigrants, legal or illegal. The Thai government asserts that it applies humanitarian conditions and observes the 1951 Convention in practice. Thailand is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and to its First, but not Second, Optional Protocol.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Interview 4, a youth who wants to go.

³⁰⁷ Interview 15, KNPP leader.

³⁰⁸ Amnesty International Publications (United Kingdom).

³⁰⁹ www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EKOI_75D873?Open Document

ICCPR article 12 (1) everyone lawfully within the territory of a state shall, within that territory, have the rights to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence: Everyone staying in Thailand has the right to freedom of movement and to choose residence including Burmese refugees on the Thai-Burma border. No need to forbid refugees wanting to go and resettle in third countries.



Thai authority gate outside Karenni refugee camp 1.

UDHR article 13 (1) everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state: Under the UDHR article 13 (1) explain and show Thailand is also member of the UHDR and have to follow what they done and should assist everyone who stay in Thailand. Therefore, the Thai authority has an obligation for everyone who stays in Thailand. They have to give everyone right to freedom of movement. But freedom of movement outside the camp is limited for the refugees.

UDHR article 15 (1) everyone has the right to a nationality: Everyone who stays in Thailand should have right to a nationality. The Thai government should freely allow for Burmese refugee people to resettle in third countries. The Thai government also has obligation to protect people who stay in Thailand

The UNHCR obligations: The UN set up a body that would, as much as possible, operate independently. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) started work on January 1, 1951, and was given a mandate to operate for three years. It was to work independently but with all the authority. This would enable it to work with governments to ensure fair treatment and international protection for all refugees.³¹⁰

The UNHCR must take steps to insure that detained Burmese refugees who identify themselves to the agency have access to international protection and will never be forcibly returned. UNHCR should make more frequent visits to the border to directly assess conditions there. Local NGOs also have responsibility for refugee and have to participate with the UNHCR and creation of workable framework and practices to enhance refugees' protection.

³¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (Jean Trier).

Conclusion

Refugee camps are not natural places to live in. Refugee camps do not have the freedom to study, work, and travel. Refugees have lost everything in their homelands and carry with them sad and painful memories. Camp life is tedious and the standard of living in this camp is very basic indeed. And yet, for more than twenty years refugees from Burma have managed to live with hope along Thai-Burma border. In reality the situation in the camp is very restricted and is not a normal life. Without charity the refugee camps are unsustainable. The refugee camps are in remote border areas where there are many armed elements. The refugees are vulnerable and abuses inevitably occur. Over the years the refugees have faced many emergencies including armed attacks on refugee camps and natural disasters such as flooding.

What will happen if Karenni people continue living in the camp without any change? Most people in the camp are illiterate and cannot do anything for themselves and always need someone's help. The youth's development in the camp is stunted through a lack of contact with the outside world. They are unaware of the daily political, economic, and social situations unfolding around them. Without change, generation after generation will be unlikely to realize its potential.

The best option is repatriation to their land in Burma. But for the Burmese refugees in Thailand, repatriation is not viable due to insecurity and violence continuing in Burma. Thailand remains unwilling to facilitate local integration in the form of legal status and residency rights. UNHCR resettlement can play a positive role in opening up possibilities to improve local conditions for the remaining refugees, such as areas of livelihood and education. The UN resettlement program is a progressive step by the UNHCR to address the entrenched refugee situation in Thailand. But there are still serious concerns for those people who remain in the camp. The camp situation is unstable. People are less and less interested to work in their community and communal unity is eroding.

According to the Bangkok Post the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has recognized an improvement in Thailand's refugee policy, the U.S Committee for Refugee and Immigrants (USCRI) viewed that refugee rights were still not well-protected here. The UNHCR, however, shared NGO concerns that no major progress has been made in development of self-reliance, and access to the labor market and opportunities for higher education, which are still limited.³¹¹ Permanent camps are not an acceptable option.

³¹¹ Bangkok Post ('Thailand ranked as one of worst places'), 20 June 2008.

Recommendations

SPDC

- Burma authorities must end the abuses which have forced the refugees to flee to Thailand.
- Stop the civil war and take the reconciliation with the ethnic groups.

Thai Government

- Grant the refugee increased freedom of movement, more job opportunities outside the camps.
- Allow UNHCR, international and local NGOs to inform and update refugees on the resettlement process.
- Ensure that all Burma refugees wishing to apply for asylum have the practical means to do so and are not barred from making such application by Thai local authorities.

UNHCR

- Ensure the resettlement process of Karenni refugees is transparent
- Ensure that impacts on the local community are taken into consideration.
- Encourage the Thai government to allow increased freedom of movement for Burma refugee in Thailand.
- Enhance UNHCR's protection capacity in the refugee camps in order to help ensure that refugees in the camp receive adequate protection and assistance, and access to UNHCR.

Karenni leaders and Karenni people

- Coordinate with UNHCR to make the program a better process.
- Advocate so the public understands process and have critical thinking about it.

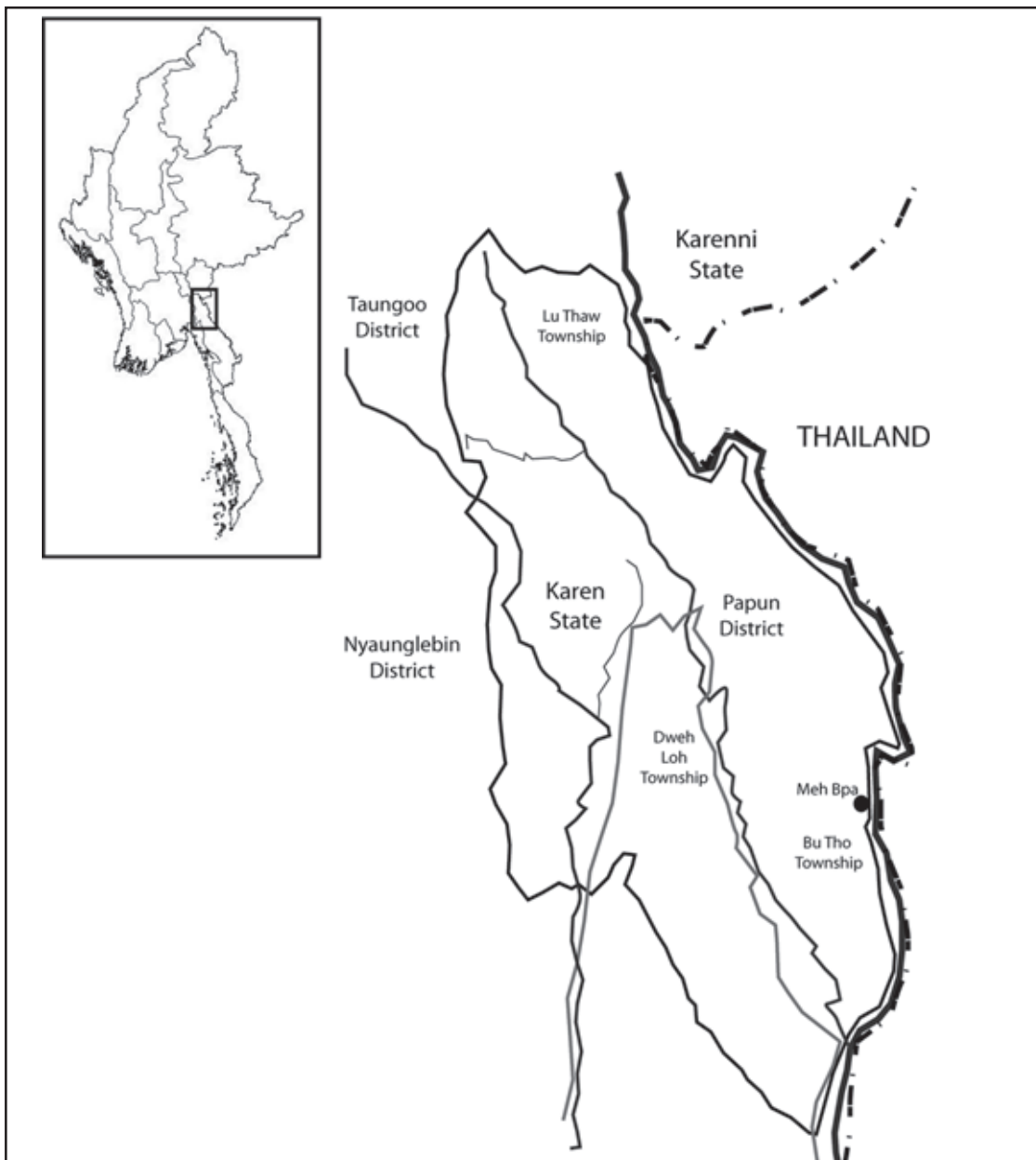
Karenni people already resettled to third counties

- Encourage people who remain in the camps.
- Express the Karenni situation to other countries.
- Maintain national responsibility wherever you stay and go.

‘Hungry for Education’: Villagers Living in Ceasefire Controlled Areas Struggle To Educate Their Children in Boo Tho Township, Papun District

By Day Day

Map of Meh Bpa Area, Bu Tho Township, in Papun District



Introduction

Historically, people living in rural areas of Burma place little value on formal education. Most people believe that with or without formal education, people can live and are able to eat. Access to education in Burma is often impossible for those people who live in the rural and mountainous areas. Given the political situation, ethnic conflict and that the country has been ruled by a military dictatorship for almost half of the century, very little attention has been paid to education. A major portion of the revenue villagers in the Meh Bpa area get is given to the military for their expenses and only a small percentage is available to use for education. It is common in Burma for schools to be found in big towns or cities. In the remote areas of the country, however, the schools are very small and unstable. These schools are only able to survive because the community works hard to establish and maintain them.

Summary

This report explains the struggle for education in the Meh Bpa area of Butho Township, Papun District. People struggle for education even in this conflict area because they feel that without education it is even more difficult to earn a living. In this report, the education situation in Meh Bpa will be explained in five parts.

The first part of the report provides the background of Meh Bpa and describes its location, natural resources and the people. In part two, the civil war between the DKBA and KNU in the Meh Bpa area is described. The third part describes how conflict affects education and includes forced relocation, security and poverty. In the fourth part, the effects of lack of education on families, health and occupation are looked at. The final part looks at how people try to struggle for an education even though they have hardships. It includes the reasons for their struggle for an education and the way the Karen Teacher Working Group (KTWG) supports the schools with stationery and teachers' salaries.

Methodology

The research focuses on how villagers currently try to struggle and plan for the education of their children. Information was collected on the internet before field work was done. Field work was done in the Meh Bpa area of Butho Township, Papun District. Three villages in the area were visited. Village heads and villagers were interviewed about the school, the occupational background of the villagers and relocations that happened because of the conflict between the KNU and the

DKBA. One of the activists from Meh Bpa village was also interviewed about the past political situation and the current situation concerning the education policy and the plans for a primary school. The secretary of the KTWG was also interviewed about the group's activities, policy, purpose and plans for the future, especially about the Meh Bpa area. Information was also obtained from the staff of the Karen Organization for Relief and Development (KORD). An activist from Papun District also helped with a lot of information about the situation in the district including the political link to dams along the Salween River and information on villagers' occupations and forced relocation.

Background of Education in Burma

According to Universal Declaration of Human Rights in article 25(1), *"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit."*

Section 20 of the 1993 Law of the Child says, *"Every child shall have the right to free basic primary education in state and that the Ministry of Education shall implement a system of free and compulsory primary education... The Ministry of Education shall implement arrangements for children, who are unable for various reasons, to attend schools opened by the state."* Burma signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in August 1991.

In reality there is no free education and the SPDC extorts money and building supplies for the schools from the local community. In some communities the schools are founded by Buddhist monasteries, other religious groups or privately funded by villagers.³¹²

In rural or conflict areas, villagers themselves have to build the schools and hire teachers at their own expense. In some rural areas there is only one primary school for five villages. In some conflict or border areas there is no school and the only choice for the poor is the monastery schools which only give a primary education. Even where there are schools, there are not enough teachers or stationery. The students have to use slates and chalk, but this is also not enough for their studies.³¹³

³¹² http://burmalibrary.org/docs4/HRDU2006_CD/education.html

³¹³ http://www.bnionline.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1606&Itemid=8

Some areas under the control of the KNU are supported by the KNU Education Department.

When the students finish primary school, it is often impossible to continue to secondary school because they need to help to provide for their families. In some placed under the control of the SPDC, students in secondary school have to face forced labor and other abuses.³¹⁴

According to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, *“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”*

Burma did not sign this article and there is no right or respect for teaching minority languages. It is discouraged and in many cases forcibly prevented. Even in areas where there is a Karen community and all the Karen are under the control of the SPDC of a ceasefire group, they are limited in their ability to study the Karen language and all the lessons must be conducted in Burmese.³¹⁵ However, in some places under the control of the KNU or DKBA they can study the Karen language but only on weekends and in summer classes. In DKBA areas they study Karen in some schools and in KNU schools they always study Karen.

Background of Meh Bpa Area

Papun District is called Mu Traw in Karen. It shares a border with Karenni State in the north, to the west with Pegu Division and Mon State and in the east with Thailand’s Mae Hong Son province. The KNU administration divides the district into three townships; Luthaw, Dwehlo and Butho in accordance with the three mountains ranges running through Papun District from north to south. The Butho range forms the major part of the western bank of the Salween River on the Karen State border.³¹⁶ The Meh Bpa area is in Butho Township, Papun District. It is also near the Hat Gyi upper dam project site on the Salween River. This township is situated along the Thai- Burma border where the Salween River flows and to the

³¹⁴ http://burmalibrary.org/docs4/HRDU2006_CD/education.html

³¹⁵ http://burmalibrary.org/docs4/HRDU2006_CD/education.html

³¹⁶ ‘Damming at Gunpoint’, Karen Rivers Watch, November 2004, page 30.