



OFFICE OF THE SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
KAREN NATIONAL UNION
KAWTHOOLEI

Urgent Call for the Karen Refugees' Protection

January 29, 2010

4,000 refugees fled last year in June, 2009 from human rights violations in the form of forced recruitment of soldiers for military service, forced labor and extortion, and from the offensive launched against the 7th Brigade of Pa-an District of the Karen National Union by the so-called Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a proxy of the SPDC military regime.

These refugees remain in Thailand in Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province after fleeing from the attack. They were placed in 3 locations of Mae U Su, Mae salit and Noepo.

The refugees living in Noe Po camp are repeatedly pressured by Thai local authorities known locally as Tak Ha-pah (Black Shirts, Rangers 39) and the Border Patrol Police (Daw Cher Daw) to go back to Ler Ber Her, the village they left behind last year. In November, the authorities often went and told the refugees that "you are not allowed to live on the Thai soil, and the Thai government does not have the policy to let refugees live in this areas". They told them that "if they are asked or questioned by the UNHCR or other groups you have to answer" I want to go back".

On January 14, Lt-Gen. Thanongsak Apirakyothin, (Ta Ha-pah), the commander of the 3rd Army Area, Thai local authorities, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and some NGOs had a meeting in the northern province of Tak and discussed the repatriation of the refugees and the plan to gradually send back more than 1,500 villagers to Burma.

Again, on January 26, the UNHCR, some NGOs, and Thai local authorities had a meeting and discussed the plan of the repatriation of these refugees.

It appears that the plan of forced repatriation of the refugees will continue with pressure. On January 28, at 9:00 AM, the Lt- Gen. Thanongsak Apirakyothin and his men took 50 refugees (included 20 women, some are children under the age of 16 and some are mothers) back to Ler Ber Her to clear the land for their return. They brought them back at 11 AM.

This area is still within the armed conflict zone where fighting can break out anytime. In addition to armed conflict, there are dangers of landmines and traps indiscriminately planted by the

DKBA and SPDC troops. This is a major concern for the security of women and children in this unsettled situation. The situation on the border is also still very volatile, and there is no guarantee for peace and security.

The villagers are now living in great fear of being forcibly repatriated. They know very well that the place is not safe, and if they are forced to return, their lives will be in danger. They are worried about their children's security. They are now under enormous pressure and in fear.

We would like to call upon you to kindly take into consideration the security and safety of these refugees and to please take immediate action to prevent the forced repatriation of the Karen refugees on humanitarian grounds.

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