



Karen Women Organization

*P.O. 19, Mae Sariang, Mae Hong Son, 58110, Thailand,
Tel: 66-53-681 084 Fax: 66-53-621410, Email: kwocentral@tttmaxnet.com
Website: www.karenwomen.org*

Emergency appeal to the Royal Thai Government not to forcibly repatriate Karen refugees back to heavily land-mined zone

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The Karen Women Organization is urgently appealing to the Royal Thai Government not to forcibly repatriate over 3,000 Karen refugees staying in Tha Song Yang, Tak Province, back to a heavily land-mined war-zone in Burma. The majority of the refugees are women and children.

This group of refugees have been told by the Thai Army that they must all be returned to Burma by February 15. The refugees were told that actions to remove them will begin on February 5th, this week. They are now living in fear of imminent forced repatriation into an area which is heavily land-mined, and where active conflict can re-ignite at any moment.

On January 28, the local Authority Thai Army and his men forced 50 refugees from this group back across the border between 9 to 11 am to start cleaning up their homes in the village of Ler Per Her in preparation for their return. This included 20 women and girls, some under 16 years of age.

However, KWO would like to state clearly that this area is not safe at all and refugees groups are not willing to return at this point in time. In recent months, five refugees from the area have been either injured or killed by landmines when slipping back into Burma to look after livestock they left behind. This included a 13-year-old boy whose leg was blown off in August last year, and a woman who was 8 months pregnant had her foot blown apart on January 18, 2010.

Blooming Night Zan, Joint Secretary 1 of KWO said, "This evidence of people stepping on the landmines is a sure sign that the situation is still very dangerous. Sending refugees back against their will into such a dangerous situation violates the international law of non-refoulement. Although the Thai government is not a signatory of the Refugee Convention, the KWO is very grateful to His Majesty the Thai King, and the Thai government, for a long history of kindness to refugees. We appeal to the Thai authorities now to show your humanitarian kindness again."

The Karen refugees fled from fighting in the Ler Per Her area in Karen State, Burma, in June 2009. The refugees were granted temporary refuge in three locations, Mae U Su, Mae Salit and Nong Bua, but have not yet been allowed to move to Mae La refugee camp in Tak Province. Since their arrival, local Thai authorities have repeatedly pressured the refugees to return home despite evidence that the area is still very dangerous.

The Karen Women Organization is gravely concerned at the planned forced repatriation of these refugees into such a dangerous area and we urgently appeal to the Royal Thai Government to halt the repatriation and continue to provide these refugees with protection on Thai soil.

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Contact Person:

Blooming Night Zan: 089 269 6272