

Karen Refugees Forcibly Repatriated

Approximately 8:30 am yesterday Thursday 17th of July Thai Black Rangers (led by the local area leader) forcibly repatriated a group of new arrivals from MRML camp to ETT IDP camp in Burma. Approximately 39 people were put onto several boats, accompanied by some camp security, camp committee and KWO reps, in addition to an escort several Black rangers and also 1 NSC staff. (NB: numbers are always difficult to report definitively, and there were several differing reports of numbers and this is what we believe to be the best report). The boat stopped at the Rangers checkpoint at the confluence of the Moei and Salween Rivers and picked up a further 20 new arrivals from MLO whom had been waiting there overnight; (KRC and MLO camp committee report that this group of 20 from MLO were not forced but rather enticed to go back to ETT and it seems that they saw it as a 'free boat ride' for them).

Of the 39 from MRML many were young students and it seems that these students were given a reprieve at the last minute and were allowed to stay at the checkpoint and then allowed to enter the camp again in a few days when things cool down a bit. Exact numbers are unknown. The boats then left upriver for ETT.

The camp committee arranged 2 weeks of food rations (rice, salt, fishpaste and cooking oil) as well as 20 large plastic sheets from their emergency stock and these items were allowed to be sent with this group of people. However the Thai Rangers did not allow any other NFIs such as blankets, mosquito nets, mats, cooking pots, etc to be sent, the reason being given that they have a very limited budget and cannot afford an extra boat for this trip.

Approximately 10am UNHCR arrived (MHS and MSR) and had talks with Camp committee representatives and then contacted UNHCR in BKK. It seems that they are well informed of the events, although they were not present during the deportation or the day preceding the deportation. Later in the afternoon (about 1:30pm yesterday) a helicopter arrived in MRML camp and we were informed that the 3rd Army commander was here, along with several other high ranking Border Rangers. UNHCR and Camp committee waited for a meeting with them, however they stayed at their landing site and conferred with Rangers staff on the ground for approximately 1 hour then the helicopter left again.

No new arrivals have undergone any agreed upon "Pre-Screening" using established criteria, and within the framework agreed upon by Mol. The camp committees have information on most if not all this group, and also the Thai Authorities have basic information in the form of names, age, sex and photos.

Some Background and preceding events...

This group of 39 from MRML are part of the larger group of 280+ new arrivals that I have been reporting during the past several months are being earmarked by Black Rangers for deportation. They seem to fit into a group of new arrivals arriving from April 2008 and are being targeted, other new arrivals before April 2008 are not having any problems.

MRML Camp Commander was **not** present in the camp during this entire week and we understand that he met with UNHCR staff on Monday 14th to inform UNHCR that this forced repatriation would indeed occur. MLO Camp Commander did meet with MRML camp committee and TBBC on Wednesday 16th and although was pushing for a deportation of 58 NAs agreed to wait until full pre-screening had taken place. After this meeting the Thai Rangers local Commander arrived, taking control and beginning to make plans for the deportation. This took all afternoon and was very confusing for all involved. The MLO and MRML Camp Commanders were no longer involved and were not seen again. NSC were also present in camp this day and it seemed did not agree with Black rangers actions, although could not stand up against them.

During the proceedings we were trying to talk with some of these new arrivals however it was obvious they were extremely stressed and we did not want to interfere. However during

Wednesday evening our staff were able to meet with 1 family and we received a compelling interview....I will give further details of this in a following email

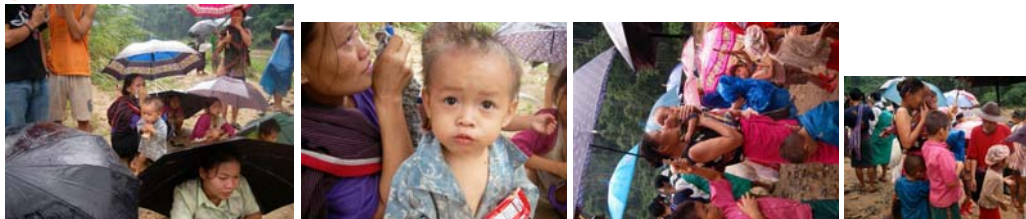
TBBC will be supplying rations to ETT for August at the end of July and thus 2 weeks of food is sufficient. We spoke with MRML camp comm. in regard to future needs and agreed to support NFIs to this group through KWO when needed.



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