



ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY MYANMAR CAUCUS

18-2 Commercial Centre, Taman Abadi Indah,
Off Old Klang Road, 58100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: +603-7984 7318, +603-7980 1393
Fax: +603-7983 7318, +603-7981 7782
<http://www.aseanmp.org> email: info@aseanmp.org

February 11 2010

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) is gravely concerned for the well being of unregistered Karen refugees currently residing in displacement sites in Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province. Announcements last month from the Thai government relating to the planned forced repatriation of the refugees beginning in February 2010 have caused renewed concern for their safety. AIPMC welcomes the Thai government's decision to halt the repatriation of the estimated 3,000 refugees until their safety can be assured. AIPMC furthermore calls on the Thai government to make public and implement a clear policy regarding refugees fleeing from conflict zones across the border in Myanmar.

The flow of refugees from Myanmar's Karen State has been increasing since June 2009 when renewed fighting between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), supported by the SPDC, put villagers in danger, causing them to flee across the border. These refugees have temporarily been permitted to reside in Thailand under the care of the Thai Military.

Despite the victory of the DKBA, the situation in Karen State remains unstable and unsafe for villagers. The area from which the refugees fled is heavily landmined and numerous injuries and deaths among people returning to their villages have been reported by organizations working in the areas concerned and with the refugees.

Though the precariousness of the situation in Karen State is well known, a group of 13 refugees from Nong Bua, mostly women and children, and a group of 26 families from Usu Tha were recently repatriated to Myanmar. These refugees were sent back without witnesses or evidence to certify that their return was voluntary. Additionally, reports have surfaced of the Thai military using threats and coercion to force refugees' return to Myanmar.

This use of threats and coercion to pressure refugees into returning to an area that is clearly not safe is unacceptable. AIPMC urges the Thai government to fully investigate these charges and to closely monitor the situation of the refugees currently under the care of the Thai Military. Furthermore, AIPMC calls on the Thai government to cooperate with UNHCR and other appropriate agencies to allow for the registration and proper care of the refugees until it is safe for them to return home.

The flow of refugees fleeing the dangerous and repressive situation in Myanmar is not a new problem. Widespread human rights violations and armed offensives by Myanmar's military government against its own citizens have caused massive refugees flows in the region for many years. The underlying source of the refugee problem is the continued violence and oppression perpetrated by Myanmar's government. To permanently end the flow of refugees from Myanmar a concerted effort to end human rights abuses and begin a dialogue of national reconciliation is necessary.

AIPMC requests ASEAN to use its Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights to investigate all claims of human rights abuses in Myanmar. Furthermore, the Commission should seek to ensure that Myanmar is held accountable for its past abuses and prevented from committing further violence against its citizens. Additionally, AIPMC urges ASEAN to develop and implement a regional policy concerning the member states' responsibilities regarding refugees.

Finally, AIPMC calls on the government of Myanmar to begin the process of national reconciliation through genuine dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy and ethnic nationalities. As a first step in this process AIPMC urges the government of Myanmar to release Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners currently in detention.

Ends.

For further comment / media interviews with AIPMC Parliamentarians, do contact – Aticha Wongwian at +66 863 863 494 (Thailand), Donny Jatisambogo +62 815 1400 6416 (Indonesia) and Roshan Jason at +6012 3750974 (Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Philippines)