

Urgent Statement:

Suspend repatriation of villagers fleeing from war to Myanmar's Karen State

8 May 2021

As of now, a number of villagers have fled from armed conflicts at the Thailand-Myanmar border by the Salween River crossing to Thailand in Mae Hong Son to seek a safe refuge here. The terrified villagers at several spots are, however, being asked by the Thai authorities to return on the one-sided claim that the situation has gone better. The villagers are scared and concerned about their safety since they are mostly composed of children, women, older persons and sick persons. They are told by the officials at the local level that they have to return citing the instructions from the higher authorities. Their continuing presence in Thailand is said to cause an impact on the border trade and the economy even though even now, the Myanmar's jet fighters are still bombing the Karen military armed forces close to the Thailand-Myanmar border and their villages. The Myanmar army has also used drones to conduct surveillance of villages deep inside and sent jet fighters there almost every day.

Given the volatile situation along the border, the Thai authorities need to assess the situation comprehensively based on correct information and reliable sources. They should consider measures that can help to remedy people who have fled from wars based on humanitarian principles along with an effort to monitor and assess the situation closely and consistently to uphold both national security and humanitarian principle.

The network calls on the Thai authorities, the Thai government and security agencies as follows;

1. The Thai government and the Ministry of Defense as part of Thailand's security agencies should coordinate and tell the Myanmar Army to stop their air strike along the Thailand-Myanmar border immediately. The Myanmar army must stop bombing civilian houses since such air strike has disproportionately affected civilians prompting them to flee from the Karent State and cross over into Thailand for their safety. This also affects the communities along the border in Thailand.
2. The Thai security agencies should allow those fleeing from armed conflicts to stay here temporarily for their safety based on humanitarian principles and ensure they urgently have access to humanitarian relief. Thailand should not drag its feet any longer since these refugees in temporary shelters are composed of newborns, young children, sick persons, pregnant women, and those suffering from diarrhea and Malaria, etc.
3. Measures should be meted out to coordinate the efforts of various parties to ensure the refugees have access to humanitarian relief. The process should be made transparent to the public and an effort should be made to

ensure proper understanding in the public about the situation. No effort should be made to impede any communication and access to humanitarian relief.

4. Temporary and safe shelters should be offered to those fleeing from war based on humanitarian principles since the villagers are composed of vulnerable groups including children and older persons.

5. The refugees shall not be pushed back to face death. The refoulment which subjects the refugees to potential danger is a breach of international customary law, namely non-refoulement which should be adhered to and respected. The villagers should be asked for consent and make the decision by themselves to return when they find the situation suits them.

The Network of the People in the Salween River