



Karen Peace Support Network

Open Letter

To: Mr. Pita Limjaroenrat, leader of Move Forward Party and Prime Minister-designate

Re: Urgent Action Required: Refugee Rights and Temporary Support

Date: June 20th, 2023

Dear Mr. Pita Limjaroenrat,

First of all, we would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to you on Thailand's recent election results. We hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits.

The Karen Peace Support Network is a network of Karen community-based organizations on the Thailand-Myanmar border. We are writing this letter to bring your attention to the pressing issues faced by refugees from Myanmar in Thailand. It is our sincere hope that the Thai government, under your leadership, will take action to address certain urgent challenges, and will work to improve Thailand's refugee policy so that it ensures Thailand's obligations towards the seven human rights treaties the country is party to and the international customary law of non-refoulement.

Here we would like to highlight a few of the issues and needs for your consideration.

Thailand at present hosts nine recognized refugee camps, with a population of around 90,000 refugees from Myanmar. These camps have existed for almost 40 years. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to successive Thai governments for granting us refuge on Thai soil although Thailand has not signed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its optional protocol. However, currently there are pressing issues, as well as issues that the refugees have been facing for decades.

First of all, you may be aware of the fact that these 90,000 refugees have been confined in their camps -- some for almost 40 years. People have no freedom to step outside of the fence. Without special permission, which is severely restricted and at times only occurs unofficially with no legal recognition, we are unable to come out to seek wild food, jobs and better opportunities in life.

While refugees are not allowed to work and earn income outside of camps, food supplies and other assistance have been reduced yearly. Currently, our food ration is valued at approximately 300 THB per month, and we believe that food aid from global donors is not likely to increase considering current world refugee problems. It should be noted that refugees are humans who do not want to be dependent on aid. We would like to stand on our own feet and seek our own opportunities so that we can feed our families. Therefore, our legal right to work and employment, even if it is going to be limited to border areas, is what we would like to ask you to take into consideration. Refugees would like to be allowed to contribute to the economy of a country that we have lived in for years and call our home as well.

The second issue for refugees in camps is the limited access to recognized education, including higher education. Our educational system is well developed, yet it is not formally recognized by Myanmar or Thailand. Refugees in camps used to have access to Thailand's informal education program but this has ceased a while ago. We therefore humbly request the new government to resume the informal education program in refugee camps, review an option to integrate the Thai educational curriculum with the refugees' curriculum and allow our children to access Thai educational institutions when they grow older. Refugees' access to quality education will not only contribute to individual development but also the development of Thailand, Myanmar, the region and the world.

The third issue for your consideration is our durable solutions, which, as outlined by the United Nations, include voluntary return, resettlement and integration. Since returning to our homes has not yet been possible due to protracted conflict and especially attacks after the recent military coup, we would like to request that both other options are open to us: resettlement in a third country and integration in Thailand -- especially for people who have been here for decades and children who were born and have grown up in refugee camps; Thailand is the only home they know. Integration with the Thai educational system in camps will foster peaceful social integration in the border areas.

The fourth and perhaps the most urgent issue is the rights, safety and well-being of thousands of new refugees who fled from air bombings, indiscriminate mortar shelling, and clashes into many districts of Thailand, at many different times, after the 2021 Myanmar military coup. Since March 2021 until the present, there have been several incidents of refoulement, coerced repatriation and denial of access to emergency assistance. Practices differed in each border area due to the lack of a clear policy and standards. In the worst cases, people were not allowed to have access to any assistance at all. In general, these new arrivals, who included the sick, disabled, newborn babies, children, pregnant women and the elderly, were received into locations with inadequate facilities such as cattle sheds and river banks, with no basic sanitary necessities, putting their health and safety at risk, and most worryingly, were pressured to return to Myanmar despite ongoing attacks.

Pushing people back across the border against their will despite their well-founded fears, and the unfavorable conditions in temporary shelters made the people understand that they were unwelcome and had no other choice but to stay as internally displaced persons in unsafe and unhealthy conditions on the Myanmar side close to the border. A large number of the IDP children

who were denied access to asylum in Thailand fell out of available educational systems and immunization programs.

Due to the facts above, we would like to request the new Thai government, under your leadership, to allow those fleeing conflict to seek and enjoy asylum in Thailand and have access to proper humanitarian assistance. These new arrivals have no intention to stay in Thailand for a long time and will choose to go back once they see it is safe for them to return.

The Karen Peace Support Network would like to express our sincere gratitude for your attention and your commitment to upholding human rights and justice in Thailand. We humbly request your attention and action to address the critical issues mentioned in this letter. We are truly hopeful that under your leadership, Thailand will make a significant difference in the lives of those facing unimaginable hardship and persecution.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,



Naw Ta Mla Saw
Chair Person
Karen Peace Support Network

Contacts:

Naw Wahkushee : +66 681182261

Saw Lay Ka Paw : +6654092280

kpsn14@gmail.com

For more information see:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/kpsn19?lang=en>

Facebook: <https://web.facebook.com/KPSN.karen>

Page : <https://www.karenpeace.org/>

