

UA 295/99 Ill-treatment and possible forcible return of asylum-seekers 10 November 199

**KINGDOM OF THAILAND      Thousands of migrant workers from Myanmar**

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Amnesty International fears for the safety of thousands of Burmese migrant workers who, since the beginning of November 1999, are being deported by the Thai government.

Many with well-founded fears of persecution in Myanmar are at risk of being returned with no opportunity to claim asylum. They fled Myanmar to escape a military regime which has imposed forced labour, portering and other human rights violations. Thousands of these workers are from ethnic minorities, including some 100,000 Shan, who are particularly vulnerable because the Thai Government will not permit them to establish refugee camps (see background information).

Amnesty International is further concerned at reports that those deported are being refused entry or being arrested for illegal entry, by the Myanmar authorities, forcing them to return to Thailand where they face re-arrest. This has resulted in many being stranded on islands in the Moei River (which separates Thailand from Myanmar), near Mae Sot, Tak Province, and in the surrounding jungle on Thai territory where they have no food, water or shelter and are at risk of dysentery and malaria.

A number of people are reported to have drowned trying to get back to Thailand by swimming across the Moei River. Between 6 and 7 November, three young Burmese women and Wai Wai, a 23-year-old man from the Karen ethnic minority, were reported to have drowned in this way.

In addition, eyewitnesses have talked of severe overcrowding at Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs) in Thailand, including the main centre at Suan Phlu, Bangkok, where arrested migrant workers are being held before being transported to the border. For the past eight years Amnesty International has documented poor conditions at IDCs in Thailand, including severe overcrowding, lack of proper food, medical care, or sanitation.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

There are more than 100,000 Burmese refugees living in Thai camps near the border with Myanmar. Thailand however, which is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, does not provide recognition for refugees and considers asylum-seekers not in camps to be "illegal immigrants", routinely arresting and detaining them in IDCs. Detained asylum-seekers are not given an opportunity to challenge the legality of their detention, as required by international standards.

The Myanmar military authorities closed the border with Thailand following a 25-hour siege of the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok by five Myanmar nationals on 1 October. The siege ended with no casualties but the five men responsible remain at large in the Myanmar border area.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- urging the Royal Thai Government not to deport thousands of Burmese migrant workers before they have had the opportunity to seek asylum and their safety can be guaranteed;
- expressing concern for their safety if they are deported;
- expressing concern at the severe overcrowding and poor conditions of detention and transport for migrant workers who are waiting to be deported and urging them to ensure they conform to international standards of detention.

**APPEALS TO (fax tones for the Minister of Interior and the Immigration Bureau can be difficult to get. The best time to try is during office hours local time +7 GMT):**

Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Pitsanuloke Road, Dusit,  
Bangkok 10300, Thailand  
**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand**  
**Faxes: + 66 2 280 1443**  
**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

Sanan Kachornprasart  
Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Thanon Atsadang  
Bangkok 10200, Thailand  
**Telegrams: Interior Minister, Bangkok, Thailand**  
**Faxes: + 66 2 223 8851**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Police Lieutenant General Chidchai Vanasatidya, Ph.D  
Commissioner of Immigration Bureau  
Immigration Bureau  
507 Suanplu, Sathorn Road  
Bangkok 10120, Thailand  
**Faxes: + 66 2 287 3114**  
**Salutation: Dear General**

**COPIES TO:**

The Editor, The Nation, 44 Moo 10  
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**Faxes: + 66 2 240 3666**

and to diplomatic representatives of KINGDOM OF THAILAND accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 December 1999.