

MYANMAR/THAILAND

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by a series of attacks on refugee camps housing Karen ethnic minority civilians from Myanmar in Tak Province, northwestern Thailand. The Democratic Buddhist Army (DKBA), a breakaway ethnic Karen armed opposition group now allied to the Myanmar military, is responsible for the attacks.

The most recent incident occurred at around 1.00am on 23 March 1998, when a small number of armed men entered Mawker refugee camp, housing over 8,000 Karen ethnic minority civilians, fired guns in the air and set fire to 50 houses. The group also fired mortars back into the camp. Four refugees were injured seriously by a shell and twelve others were wounded; the four are now hospitalized. Almost 300 refugees have been made homeless. Troops from the Fourth Infantry Task Force, Royal Thai Third Army, fired artillery in response to the attack.

In the early hours of 11 March 1998 over 100 DKBA troops attacked Huay Kaloke refugee camp, killing four people and wounding 39. Most of the camp was destroyed. After strong international criticism, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, the new name of the Myanmar military government) denied any involvement. However, DKBA troops operate in areas which are controlled by SPDC troops, and other information indicates that Burmese troops were involved. Amnesty International condemns these attacks and urges the SPDC to ensure that the DKBA do not launch any further attacks.

Although the Royal Thai Army has increased its presence and stepped up security measures, Amnesty International is concerned that security is not sufficient to prevent such attacks from continuing. It calls on the Royal Thai Government to take immediate measures to secure the refugee camps. The Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), of which Thailand is a member, has concluded that refugee camps should "as far as possible" be located at a safe distance from the border.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In December 1994 the DKBA broke away from the armed ethnic minority opposition group, the Karen National Union (KNU). As a result of fighting between the DKBA and Burmese troops on the one hand, and the KNU on the other, thousands of Karen civilians sought refuge in Thailand, joining tens of thousands already in camps there. Beginning in February 1995, DKBA troops began to attack Karen refugee camps close to the Myanmar border, killing both Karen refugees and Thai nationals. In January 1997, DKBA forces destroyed Huay Kaloke and Don Pa Piang refugee camps, leaving thousands of refugees homeless. Huay Kaloke camp was subsequently rebuilt amid fears that it was located in a vulnerable position and would be attacked again.

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

To the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC):

- calling on the SPDC to issue clear orders to both the Burmese army and to the DKBA that attacks against civilian targets in Thailand will not be tolerated;
- urging the SPDC to promptly initiate an independent investigation of the three attacks and to bring those found responsible to justice.

To the Royal Thai Government:

- calling on the Royal Thai Government to take immediate steps to increase security on the Thai/Myanmar border;
- urging the Thai authorities to locate refugee camps at a safe distance from the frontier, and to ensure that refugees are given protection.

APPEALS TO:

Myanmar:

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt,
Secretary 1
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI)
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office
Yangon, Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: General Khin Nyunt, Yangon, Myanmar

Telexes: 21316

Salutation: Dear Secretary 1

Brigadier General Myint Aung, Member SPDC
and Commander, Southeast Military Command
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI)
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office
Yangon, Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: Brigadier Myint Aung

Salutation: Dear Brigadier

Thailand:

His Excellency Mr. Surin Pitsuwan
Foreign Ministry
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Saranramya Palace
Bangkok 10200
Thailand

Excellency Pitsuwan, Bangkok, Thailand

Faxes: +66 2 225 6155

Salutation: Your Excellency

Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai
Office of the Prime Minister
Government House
Nakhorn Pathom Road
Bangkok 10300
Thailand

Prime Minister Leekpai, Bangkok, Thailand

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO:

diplomatic representatives of MYANMAR and THAILAND accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 May 1998.