

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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**PLEASE BRING TO THE ATTENTION OF REFUGEE COORDINATORS.**

UA 178/91

Refoulement

23 May 1991

**THAILAND: Threats of deportation of Burmese to Myanmar  
and Closure of the Thai Border to Burmese Asylum-Seekers**

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Amnesty International is concerned about reports that on 20 and 21 May 1991 Thai military authorities in Tak province announced plans to deport some 15,000 to 20,000 Burmese "*illegal immigrants*" living in the province to Myanmar (formerly Burma) by the end of May. They also announced that no more asylum-seekers or others from Myanmar will be allowed to enter Thailand "*illegally*". The organization is concerned that many of those threatened with deportation and denial of entry to Thailand may be at risk of imprisonment for their non-violent political activities or face torture and execution, if as a result they fall into the custody of Myanmar's ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Amnesty International is therefore calling on the Thai authorities to allow any Burmese who may face such risks to remain in Thailand and to allow any Burmese wishing to enter Thailand to seek protection from such risks to do so.

According to press reports, the deportation plans were announced by Task Force 34, a special unit responsible for matters relating to the Thailand-Myanmar border. Its headquarters is in Mae Sot, a border town in Tak province, which is under the responsibility of the Thai army's Third Region command. According to the announcement, most of those to be deported had allegedly come to Thailand illegally to seek work with local Thai employers.

However, a Task Force 34 officer is reported to have said that student political activists who had fled Myanmar to escape SLORC repression would also be rounded up and sent back across the border. According to some reports, student activists and "*illegal immigrants*" who are members of Myanmar's ethnic minority groups will not be handed over to SLORC authorities, but will instead be deported to Myanmar territory not under its control, such as areas held by the insurgent Karen National Union. These areas recently came under heavy attack by SLORC troops, during which they were bombed from the air and shelled by artillery, with the result that thousands of Burmese fled into Thailand. It appears that these recent arrivals are also to be deported, and closure of the border would prevent them and others from escaping to Thailand should the SLORC attack remaining pockets of insurgent control and possibly even overrun them. This could result in the survivors being captured by the SLORC.

According to Task Force 34, the deportation is to be carried out by the authorities of Tak province, assisted by police and military forces. Those employing or giving sanctuary to Burmese have been warned they have seven days to turn them over to the authorities or face prosecution for harbouring "*illegal immigrants*". Joint police and army teams will then conduct house-to-house searches for any "*illegal immigrants*" still at large.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Myanmar borders Thailand on the west. Since the SLORC took power in a coup d'etat in September 1988, thousands of political activists and others have fled from Myanmar to Thailand to escape large-scale human rights violations by the SLORC.

Amnesty International has on several recent occasions raised concern that Thai authorities have forcibly repatriated Burmese asylum-seekers to Myanmar or may be detaining them in Thailand unnecessarily. The organization believes the planned deportation and border closure would contravene the principle of *non-refoulement*. According to this international human rights norm, no government should send a person to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, and no government should reject for entry someone facing such risks. "*Illegal entry*" cannot justify the expulsion or rejection of people at risk of human rights violations.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:**

- expressing concern at reports that Burmese "*illegal immigrants*" in Tak province are to be deported and the border closed, and that this may result in their detention for non-violent political activities or in their torture or execution;

- urging that no Burmese asylum-seekers be returned to Myanmar against their will and that any Burmese wishing to seek asylum in Thailand be allowed to do so, in order that they be afforded effective protection from such serious human rights violations;

- urging that all Burmese seeking protection for their human rights in Thailand be treated in accordance with international human rights standards, including being given access to a fair and impartial procedure for examining asylum claims.

**APPEALS TO:**

Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun  
Government House  
Nakhorn Pathom Road  
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

**Telegrams: Prime Minister Panyarachun, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Telexes: 84791 IMFODEP TH  
(Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**

**Faxes: + 66 2 382 6782**

Gen Itsaraphong Nunphakdii  
Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Atsadang Road  
Bangkok 10200, Thailand

**Telegrams: Minister Interior, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Telexes: 84791 IMFODEP TH  
(Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**

The Governor  
Sala Klang  
Tak 63000, Thailand

**Telegrams: Governor Sala Klang, Tak, Thailand**

The Commander  
Task Force 34  
Mae Sot  
Tak 63110, Thailand

**Telegrams: Commander Task Force 34, Mae Sot,  
Tak, Thailand**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Thailand in your country

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 July 1991.