
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 204/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **HAITI** (this item is for response only), **THAILAND** (see news schedule below).

PLEASE NOTE: If you urgently need to get in touch with someone from the IS press office out of office hours, you can reach Casey Kelso (the IS press officer) on 44 81 801 3556.

PLEASE NOTE: AI Netherlands has requested that we pass on this message: The European Press Officers meeting is confirmed for 27 and 28 October. Eight sections have already confirmed that they will be attending and if anyone else wishes to attend, they should contact Maud Bredero at AI Netherlands asap. She will soon be distributing an agenda for the meeting to sections attending.

Seven sections kindly offered to sponsor some Eastern European press officers to attend this meeting. After discussions, we have all agreed that it would be more appropriate for them to attend the international press officers meeting to be held in London at the IS early next year. It would be greatly appreciated if those sections who offered sponsorship could postpone this for then, so that as many members of our international press team can attend that meeting.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Brazil - 14 September - PLEASE NOTE THIS IS AN INTERNATIONAL RELEASE. SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Kosovo - 19 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

****Indonesia - 28 September**** - LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN

The news release and Q&A sheet will be sent out in a News Service on Monday morning. I will also send out an update sheet on media plans for the campaign launch next week. Paula

Algeria - first week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

France - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

**** Thailand - 8 September**** - The news release enclosed is being sent to Asian media only. We are swiftairing the report to you today. SEE NEWS SERVICE 184/94

Togo - 15 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 168/94

Turkey - 14 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 181/94

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EMBARGOED FOR 6 SEPTEMBER 1994

THAILAND: CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION PUTS REFUGEES AT RISK

Long periods of detention, fines and forcible return to the countries they fled are the prospect that many refugees face when they seek asylum in Thailand, Amnesty International said in a report issued today.

There are no procedures by which asylum-seekers can gain legal protection in Thailand, and there is no special recognition of their particularly vulnerable situation. As such, the legal position of asylum-seekers and refugees falls far short of international standards for the protection of refugees.

"It is a disgrace that asylum-seekers in Thailand -- who have fled from their own countries often in fear for their lives -- are treated no differently from migrants working without a permit, or tourists who have overstayed on a visa," Amnesty International said.

The latest event in a crackdown on "illegal immigration" which is putting refugees at risk was last month's forcible return of several hundred Burmese to the Halockhanie refugee camp on the Thai border, part of which is actually located within Myanmar.

The camp has been declared "safe" by the Thai authorities, yet on 21 July about 360 Myanmar soldiers attacked the Myanmar side of the camp, torching part of it and taking at least 16 men prisoner. As a result, some 2,000 refugees fled back over the border to Thailand.

"The Thai authorities cannot claim that this is a safe area. No-one should be forced to go there," Amnesty International said.

The Thai Government has over the last thirty years been generous towards asylum-seekers, sheltering hundreds of thousands of refugees, mainly from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, as war and political repression forced people to flee their homelands.

However, since the crackdown on illegal immigrants was announced in 1993, asylum-seekers have been treated increasingly harshly. In particular those from Myanmar, who now form the largest single group of refugees in the country, are at risk of lengthy detention and forcible return.

Once an asylum-seeker is arrested and found not to have the appropriate documentation, prosecution for "illegal immigration" follows. No opportunity is given for asylum-seekers to explain why they left their country or whether they are registered as "persons of concern" with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Indeed, the purpose of the court hearing appears to be simply to pass sentence.

The penalty is to pay large fines or serve 40 or 60 days' imprisonment and then leave the country or, if they are Burmese, be deported to so-called "safe areas" on the Myanmar border, at their own expense.

It is ironic that for many asylum-seekers and refugees, their main protection against forcible return to their country of origin -- where they may be at risk of serious human rights violations -- is that if they cannot pay for a ticket, they will not be sent back. Instead, they will remain in detention often for months after the period of their sentence.

During a visit to Thailand in April and May, Amnesty International delegates interviewed many asylum-seekers both in Bangkok and in the border camps. All those interviewed had been detained at the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in Bangkok on at least one occasion.

The conditions in the IDC fall far short of basic international minimum standards and in some cases amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Detainees are squashed into rooms which are often so badly overcrowded the inmates cannot lie down. Food rations are inadequate and children do not qualify for them, forcing their mothers to share their scant supplies with them.

The Thai Government's policy of detaining asylum-seekers and refugees is in clear contravention of international standards which state that the detention of asylum-seekers or refugees should normally be avoided and should only occur for specified reasons which do not include illegal immigration.

Furthermore, it has a seriously detrimental effect on their ability to seek protection. For example, detention of UNHCR-registered "persons of concern" prevents these individuals from making direct applications to embassies of countries which may be able to offer them asylum.

In its report, Amnesty International is calling on the Government of Thailand urgently to accede to and implement the terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, in order to better ensure the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in Thailand.

The Thai authorities should establish a fair and adequate procedure accessible to all asylum-seekers to enable them to present their reasons for fearing to return to their home country.

"These people need help and protection. It is the Thai Government's responsibility to give it to them," Amnesty International said. ENDS/

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HAITI: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WRITES TO CARIBBEAN STATES WHO OFFERED TROOPS IN EVENT OF ARMED INTERVENTION

Amnesty International has written to the five member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) who, at a meeting earlier this week, offered to supply troops to a United States-led force in the event of an armed intervention in Haiti.

"We have serious concerns both about the protection of human rights in the event of an armed intervention, and about the continuing situation of gross violations of human rights in Haiti," the organization said.

Any intervening force should be aware of its obligation to respect the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, which is central to all military operations in all contexts. Force used against civilians would be a violation of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Amnesty International is urging the authorities of the five countries -- Antigua, Barbados, Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago -- to make clear what steps would be taken, in the event of an armed intervention, to ensure that international human rights and United Nations criminal justice standards are adhered to at all times. This is particularly important as the intervening forces may be required to take on law enforcement functions.

The organization is especially concerned that troops should be advised on the minimum human rights standards must respected; the use of force and respect for the civilian population; and complaints procedures during and following any armed intervention.

"It is vital that during any intervention there should be a high degree of transparency and that impartial information about any allegations is quickly published," Amnesty International said.

In the event of military intervention in Haiti, Amnesty International urges that international human rights observers are given access to monitor and report on human rights violations in that country. All governments in the region should commit themselves to ensuring that the perpetrators of human rights violations in the country are tried fairly under international law.

In the longer term, and in the event of a multinational presence in Haiti, Amnesty International is urging governments to ensure that the independent human rights mission established in Haiti by the United Nations and the Organization of American States remain in a position to report on any human rights violations that may be committed.

All governments in the region should send a strong message to the present de facto authorities in Haiti stressing that the continuing situation of gross violations of human rights in Haiti is intolerable under both national and international law, and that steps should be taken immediately to prevent further violations and to identify and prosecute the perpetrators.

"The serious abuse of human rights in Haiti is a long-term issue. There is a fundamental need to continue monitoring the human rights situation in Haiti," Amnesty International said.

"A society in which human rights are respected can only be built when long-term solutions to the current crisis have been considered."

ENDS