



KAREN REFUGEE COMMITTEE

MONTHLY REPORT

APRIL 1997



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April is the hottest month of the year in our part of the world. As usual, the temperature of the air normally stays above 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35°C), in day time. In such heat, the thatch or leave roofs of the huts of the refugees in the camps turn tinder dry. Rain water from the April showers, which we had twice this year, dried up in no time. Fire has become a serious hazard and much effort has to be made to prevent it from breaking out.

But as if to take advantage of the situation, about 80 DKB A and SLORC troops came into Ta Per Poo refugee camp in Umphang township, on the night of April 26, and burnt down 18 huts, including some shop-houses, after looting cash and goods from the shops. The intruders shot dead one refugee, a deserter from their own ranks, and threaten to burn down the whole camp next time, if the refugees do not go back and live in Ga-lor-waw, a village about 6 miles on the other side of the border line. The 4 or 5 Thai militia men guarding the camp, of course, were much out-numbered and had to beat a hasty retreat.

One other regrettable matter is that the refugees in the border area of Kanchanaburi are still in a state of uncertainty, as they are being moved from one place to another. It is apparently a case of the local authorities flip-flopping, because "now they get the permission to build a shelter, now they don't," in spite of the long-standing and noble tradition of the Kingdom and the humane policy of the Royal Thai Government to extend a sanctuary and humanitarian treatment to those fleeing from severe persecution and repression whether on political, religious or ethnic ground. The sympathetic NGOs, the International Community and the KRC have done their best to alleviate the trouble and sufferings of the refugees in the area, but clearly more effort is called for.

On April 28, a piece of disturbing information received by the KRC was the flight of 426 homeless families, numbering 2,167 persons, from the hill area of Nyaung-lay-bin district. These civilians have been uprooted by the ongoing major offensive initiated by the SLORC in February against the KNU. Reportedly, the drugcrazed SLORC troops involved in the military operations burnt down all their villages, granaries, harvests and shot dead all the live-stock, cutting down orchards, shooting at all people in sight and etc., in short making these people impossible to survive in their own areas. The KRC received regularly reports of atrocities against the civilians in other areas as well, but it seems that this group finds it totally impossible to continue hiding in jungles, living on wild vegetables, beats and roots which have limited food value.

We, the Karen Refugee Committee, would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the Thai authorities concerned, and the Royal Thai Government for allowing the refugees to take refuge in the border area of Thailand and permitting the international NGOs to provide the basic needs to the refugees. We are also much indebted to the various international NGOs, humanitarian organizations and aid agencies for their continued assistance and help, the International Community, individuals, our friends far and near for their sympathy, support and valuable advice.

May God bless all of you.

I beg to remain.

Yours faithfully,

A square box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'Robert Htwe'. Below the signature, the name 'Robert Htwe' is printed in a small, black, sans-serif font.

Chairman

Karen Refugee Committee