



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Report from the Field

April 1, 2010 / KHRG #2010-F3 Appendixes

Appendixes to “Functionally Refoulement”

The following document contains seven appendixes that provide full interview transcripts and other supporting evidence for the KHRG report “Functionally Refoulement: Camps in Tha Song Yang District abandoned as refugees bow to pressure.” Information is organised as follows:

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Appendix 1: KWO interviews with refugees in Tha Song Yang

Interview | Naw --- (female, 51), Tha Song Yang District (February 17th 2010)

How old are you?

51 years old.

What is your occupation?

We can't do anything. We just stay like this.

How many family members do you have?

Altogether there are four.

You have three kids?

Yes.

How many girls?

One little girl.

Do you still have your husband?

No.

How many years has it been since he passed away?

It's already been seven years.

What is your religion?

Baptist Christian.

When did you come up here?

[Other people answering] July last year.

When did you return – this month or last month?

[Other people answering] This month on the 5th.

When you returned to your village, did you reach your village?

Yes, I went back to Ler Per Her.

Is that on the other side of the river?

Yes.

Do you live in Ler Per Her?

Yes.

Are there any other villagers?

No, there's no one. Only K--- stays there.

Why did you return to the other side of the river?

The Thais asked us and asked us to go back.

How did they tell you?

They told us that the time limit to stay here was already finished and we couldn't continue to stay. On the 5th [of February] we started to return and there will be more people leaving on 15th. Then just our three households went back.

How many people did the three families include?

There were 10 people.

[Other people answering] One went back the next day. Then there were eleven people.

How many men did the group include?

[other people answering] There was one man and two little boys.

After that did the Thais tell you anything else?

On that day how did you go back after they talked you?

Then we got on the truck and went back. They sent us to his [person unspecified] house and we stayed there for a while. Then he called another [Thai] friend we don't know the name of, and then he gathered us and told us to go to the other side of the river. We told them we didn't dare to go back and we made ourselves lazy. Then they forced us to look for our bags and loads. Then each of us took just a few things. Then he told us to go back. Then he said [something or someone] was missing and he asked us to look for the missing but we didn't look. Then they forced us to go back and we took our things and kids and we walked down the path. Then he followed us and took pictures along the way until the end.

Which path?

The path to the river bank. He went down and he went ahead of us and took photos till we reached the river bank. When we reached the river bank, he asked us to get on the boat.

Was the boat ready and waiting there?

Yes, the boat was there but I don't know who owned it. He asked us to get on the boat and he told us to go back. But we told him we didn't dare to go back. Then he told us, "When you reach there, you can come back." When the boat started moving, he asked us to wave goodbye. Then

I waved my hand once and stayed like that. Then he asked my *doh*¹ [something], but what he asked I couldn't remember.

[Her doh speaking] He asked – “When you go back did you go back by your own will, or did you want to go back?”

I told them, “I didn't want to go back and I didn't dare to go back, but you forced us and we had to go back. My rice pot is boiling and no one will look after it for me.”

What happed when you got to the other side of the river?

When got there we just stayed like that and

Did they follow you to the other side of the river?

No, they just stayed on the river bank and took video of our leaving till we reached the other side of the river. When we reached there, we got on the bank of the river and one boy went to the side of the road. They told the boy, “Nephew, don't go off the road,” and we looked at the side of the road and we saw the stakes. Then they told us to follow the road. I took my children's hands and told them walk on the road, and I told you don't come back.

I stayed with an unhappy face. They told us, “Don't worry, take a rest here.” Then we took a rest. Then they asked us to go down ahead close to the school at the church. When we reached the church, they asked us questions.

They said, “People said many people would come back, but only three households of you have back,” and I said, “Yes only three families came back.”

“Only three families came back and why did you come back?”

And I told them, “I don't know, people said we had to gather ourselves at the river bank, but they forced us to come back.”

When you got there where did you go and sleep?

We slept at a nursery school. The DKBA asked us to stay there.

How many days did you stay there?

We stayed for four days.

You went back and stayed for four days, and what do you do to survive?

They asked us to cook rice.

Did they give you uncooked rice?

Yes,

What other things?

¹ This term is used to describe the relationship between the two sets of parents of a married couple.

Fish paste, chili and MSG, and we ate that.

Did all three families cook together?

We cooked together.

Do you stay together?

Yes.

How do you feel when you haven't gone back to your own village?

[Other people answering] They went back to their own village but they didn't dare to go back to their houses. We didn't dare to go back to our house. We still have a house.

Do they still have houses on the other side of the river?

We still have houses. The DKBA asked us, "Do you still have houses?"

We told them, "We did have houses, but people burned down all of our houses." We showed them a burned site. We weren't happy to go back and stay as only three families, so we had to lie.

How many people stay there?

I don't know. We didn't dare to go anywhere. They stayed one here and one there; some stayed on the hillside. We didn't go there.

Could you guess how many of them stay there?

I don't know how many.

What did you do day to day within that four days that you went back and stayed there?

After we ate rice, we went back and stayed in the nursery school and slept, and in the late afternoon, when it was time to cook, we got up and cooked. We didn't let our kids go around. They told us, "Don't worry, you can walk around. When you stay like that you'll get sick." They told my kids but I told my kids not to walk around.

When you went back did the DKBA welcome you well?

They welcomed and provided us with food.

Did you have to look for firewood?

They used people's old house posts but us, we wouldn't do that.

So you didn't dare to walk around?

They told us to walk around, but we didn't dare do that.

What about them [the DKBA]?

They'd come and stayed there for a long time already, and they were only going around close places. I didn't see them go to far-away places.

When you went back and stayed for four days, how did you see their [the DKBA's] situation, or the situation there?

I don't know what to say.

When you went back, what did you see? There were some houses that were burned down and there are still some houses [standing]; what other things did you see? [Another person asking] When you saw your own country, did you feel good or bad?

We saw houses that were burned down, and there were still some houses that weren't burned.

The houses that weren't burned were more or less [than the houses that were]?

No, few were left unburned.

So after four days you came back?

Yes, they told us, "If you want to go back, you can go back. Only three families of you came back, [it] doesn't make any difference.

How did you come back on that day?

They sent us to the river bank and [we came] to this side of the river bank.

From the river bank to here, how did you come back?

Her husband went and took us from there.

When you went back there [to Ler Per Her], weren't you happy there?

No, I wasn't happy there.

Why?

Because they are Karen, but we didn't see them often like this, and we weren't happy to go back and stay there.

During the time when you went back and stayed there, how was the relationship between you and them [the DKBA]? How did they treat you?

I don't know what to say.

Did they speak with you with nice words?

When we stayed for one or two days they spoke with us well, and I don't know [what would've happened] if we'd stayed longer. For those few days, they spoke with us well.

There were no other villagers, right?

Yes, no other villagers.

When you went back to the other side of the river bank and to the nursery school, how many minutes did you have to walk?

I don't know. We just walked and stopped, walked and stopped.

So when you were on the way, you only walked on the road?

Yes,

You didn't dare to walk beside the road?

No, we didn't dare to go beside the road.

Were there landmines?

I don't know. There could've been some, but we didn't ask them. We just walked straight on the road as they asked us.

Did you follow them?

Yes, we followed them.

What did you see when you first arrived back?

What we saw was that when we got off the boat at the river, they told one boy, "Nephew, don't walk beside the road," and we looked and we saw the stakes.

You don't know how many of them [DKBA] there were?

Yes, I don't know how many of them there were. They stay two soldiers in one location.

Do they have their own huts?

They stay in people's houses.

Which part of the camp did they burn?

They burned houses on the clinic side.

Did they burn houses at the place where the church was built?

No, they didn't burn on that side.

[Another person answering] And they stay in those houses.

You went back and stayed for four days, and did you all come back together?

Yes, all three of our families came back together to the river bank.

[Another woman answering] Only two families came here and one family was sent to another place.

Where did they send them?

I don't know, they went back to their own village.

[Another woman speaking at the same time] They went back to Gkyaw Gkay Hta village.

From the camp and to the river bank, did all three families come back?

Yes.

***[Another interviewer]* - How did you contact with her husband to take you here?**

[Another woman answering] Her husband was going up and down. There was one old man and woman there.

Were they Karen?

[Another woman answering] Yes, they were Karen and they phoned to contact him.

When you went back, did you bring a lot of things with you?

No,

What did you bring?

I brought one pot and one or two plates and blankets.

What other things?

We just went back with the clothes on us.

How did you take baths when you went back and stayed?

We went and took baths twice in the Moei River.

Did you go and walk by yourselves or did they follow you?

They came and waited for us where people cross the river at Mae Plu gate. There were two soldiers sitting at the gate.

After you showered did they follow you back?

No, they have to sit and wait at the gate. They are on sentry duty and even at night time they have to sleep there.

When did you go and get cooking water?

They got it with water plumbing as in the past.

[Another woman answering] For water they used the same water as refugees used before. They fill the water in a big water container, and if they need water they just go and open the water gate. They use water which refugees used in the past.

When you stayed there, did you go and look for vegetables?

Me, I did go.

Did other people go?

Only K---'s mother went. She went and picked old papaya leaves just close to the house.

Did you dare to walk around in that area?

Yes, we could walk around the nursery school. She went to pick one or two salty eggplants.

Did you dare to go to far-away places?

No, we didn't dare. When people brought [vegetables] back, we ate them, but we didn't dare to go and look for ourselves.

When the Thais forced you to go, how many of them followed you to the river bank?

There were five of them, including one lady.

Now do they stay in the new arrival site?

[Another woman answering] No, those people don't stay here. I hadn't seen them before. One of them has yellow hair and she often comes.

Had they visited the camp before?

I am not sure.

[Another woman speaking] Yes they've come. I've seen the fat man and the lady with yellow hair, I've seen them visit before. The man who looks like T---'s father, him I don't know. I didn't know that they'd force people to leave. If I'd known that, I could've run away when they came down.

There are still a lot of other people staying back here. Why were only the three groups of your families forced to go back?

First, they told us that there'd be one or two other families that would go back on the 5th. So for us, they forced three families to get in the car for.

When you left the house, where did you go to get on the truck?

We got on the truck at the front bamboo gate [of the camp in Thailand].

Did they ask people to gather in that place?

Yes.

Were there any other villagers there apart from your group?

There were many people there.

[Another woman answering] There were 30 families to go back. They said, what about the others? If there weren't 30 families, there'd have been 28 families. They said, "We can't carry everyone now. We will do three families first."

What kind of car was it?

A small car like in the villages. They just went and hired car in the village. The military trucks didn't dare to carry us.

Among the many families, they only let three of your families go back?

It was because the car could carry only three families.

[Another woman explaining] They were told that first three families would go back and more people would come later. It would work like that. One car can carry three families, and so three families got in the car first. After the three families left, the UN arrived and the others didn't need to go back.

The UN didn't know that the three families had gone back?

When the UN found out, the UN followed the three families and they [the Thai authorities] sent the three families to the other side of the river in a hurry. If not, these groups could've run away. First they [the families sent back] were told to go back and gather again at my house [the woman speaking] and when the second group arrived, then they'd move to another place on the other side of the river. At first, they weren't told about [going to] the other side of the river. They were only told to gather at my house. After they left, the UN arrived in the camp when the others prepared themselves to leave, but the UN didn't let them leave. The groups which had gathered at my house, when the Thais knew that the UN had arrived, they quickly sent them to the other side of the river.

So had they already contacted with the DKBA?

Yes, they always had contact from when we started get into the car.

What time was it when you left?

It started at 9 am.

How long did you stay at her house?

[Another woman answering] We stayed at her house for half an hour. It wasn't so long.

What time did you arrive at the other side of the river?

It was about 11am. It was very hot.

Among the eleven people who went back, there was one man and how many children?

There were five children and five women.

When you went back and stayed there, did the DKBA soldiers come and chat with you?

They came but I didn't listen to them. I stayed to the side and lay down. I didn't chat with them.

Was the nursery school big?

Yes, it is big.

Do they give you clothes and blankets?

No, they didn't, we brought our own blankets.

Did they give food?

Yes, we ate their food. They also stayed there. They ate together with us.

[Another woman speaking] – They stayed there and ate with us too.

[Some video missing]

He followed his father and brother. His father ran away, and when he got to Mae Plu, The Thais saw him and called him to follow [them]. He couldn't run or escape. Even when we come here, we have to run. When we stay there, we run and [when we] stay here, we have to run too.

When you came back here, where did you stay?

I stayed with my parents-in-law.

Do your parents-in-law stay here?

They have been here for a long time.

How many people stay together with your parents-in-law?

There were seven people staying together, and one family sometimes visits their parents-in-law in Mae La Camp.

When you first fled here, did you stay with your parents-in-law?

No.

So only this time, you came back and stayed with your parents-in-law?

Yes.

Where did the other woman live?

In the past, she stayed in Gklay Moe Kee. Now we've built a house and asked her to stay. She couldn't go and stay at another place. She has no people to rely on and she is a widow.

What is the situation in the new arrival site? What do you do for day to day [survival] as you can't work?

We can't work. We think, we have no other work and we think we [want to] look for paid labour, but they lie in wait around us and don't like us to go outside. We can't go to look for vegetables. People have tried to go out secretly and when they [the authorities] found out the way, they blocked it. After every way is blocked, we have to stay in the site.

When they saw [people going out], did they arrest people?

Yes, last time, they arrested people three times.

What did they do to those people who they arrested?

They tied [them up] but I don't know what they did, because we didn't see. We just heard they arrested people. Last time, they arrested seven people.

Where did those people go?

They just went to the village to look for vegetables.

They even arrest people who go to the village?

Yes, because people go the secret way. They arrest people at the side of the Church.

How did you see the situation when you went back and stayed there?

When we arrived there, they liked us to go around there but they told us, “Don’t go across the river.” They didn’t like it. I don’t know why. They just told us, “Don’t go to the other side of the river.” For me, I used to smoke a pipe and chew betel nut a lot, and we didn’t bring anything with us. We have no tobacco left and no lighter. I told them, “I will go,” but they said, “Do not go.” They also didn’t let their people [DKBA] cross the river, either.

Is that the other side of the river?

Yes, we went back and stayed for four days in Ler Per Her, and they didn’t let us come back here. They blocked everybody.

Are there any houses just on the river bank?

[There are] no houses just on the river bank. Only from Mae Pluh.

Interview | Naw --- (female), Tha Song Yang District (February 17th 2010)

How many family members do you have?

We have seven family members including one daughter-in-law.

How many children do you have?

We have three children.

How old is he?

My husband is 46 years old.

What is his occupation?

He does not have any job to do, yet.

How many people were included in your group when you returned?

There were four people: my husband and I, my daughter-in-law and one of my children.

Why did you return?

Some people came to my house and talked to me and asked me to go back. They were wearing hats like you. They did not wear any army uniforms. At first, I didn’t listen to them and I went to stay inside my bedroom. Then, they asked me to get into a car. I told them, “Why do we have to get into the car? I am afraid to get into the car.”

They told me to get into the car; if I got into the car first, the other people would go later. When we reached to our destination, they asked us to get down from the truck. We could carry only a small bag and a pot. I thought about running away secretly but if I ran away, my daughter-in-law would’ve had to look after two children. If there were no children, we could’ve escaped; but we didn’t run away and stayed in the area where the truck stopped.

At first, there were four people that went down and only a fat man came to pick us up. When we arrived, this man asked us to take our loads and I told him that I did not want to go. He said that they'd asked people to come and wait there, and he complained in Thai. We did not understand his complaint. One of the Thai soldiers told us we just had to go to the river bank. I replied, "Just only to the river bank, we do not have to go anywhere [further]."

Then, we followed them there [to the riverbank]. When we got there, they asked us to sit down and they took photos of us. After that, they asked us to get into a boat. I replied that I would not get into the boat, saying, "You tell me to go from place to place."

The owner of the boat, who could speak Karen, told us: "You just have to ride the boat to the other side of the river bank, because they have to take your photos when you're riding the boat. Then, you can come back."

I told him if that were true, we'd get into the boat. When we reached the other side of the river bank, they sent us to DKBA soldiers. They talked on the phone to each other. They asked us to go further and I refused to go, and told them that I wanted to come back. Then, they forced us to go further and further. When we arrived to the first houses, I turned back to the Moei river bank and my daughter-in-law followed me. I thought about swimming back, but I was carrying my child. If I was alone, I would've swum back to the other side of the river bank. I also thought that if I swam back, people [not specified, but probably those forcing them to return] would've likely restricted us. So, I came back.

Then, people told me to meet with the column commander. When I went to see him, he was in the church. He asked me, "Where did you live before?"

I told him where we lived before, and he continued asking me, "Why did you flee?"

I replied, "We fled because you came and shot us. We're afraid of guns. We also knew that we'd die if we were shot by guns. So, we fled. If you'd come without shooting us, we wouldn't have fled."

Again, he asked me, "Why do you return?"

I told him, "People forced us to return."

He asked, "Who forced you to return?"

I said, "Thai soldiers forced us to return."

Then, he told me, "People said you were coming back with many people."

I replied, "I don't know if there are many people or not. We didn't even have time to prepare ourselves, they rushed us away. Since the day we were forced to go back and until the next day, we couldn't eat. If we think back, we couldn't sleep and eat. We sat down on the ground for the whole day. DKBA soldiers asked us to walk around, but we didn't dare to go and walk around the road because we couldn't see if there were landmines beside the road or in the bush or not. Even they themselves [DKBA soldiers] don't walk around carelessly. They just walk straight and follow only along the road. And, they operate in the areas where they're trading wood. If they plant landmines they will know where the landmines are, and they can avoid going to those areas. For us, we don't know so we don't dare to go anywhere. They asked us to build houses but I told them I don't want to build any houses or stay here. I just want to go back."

Two days later, one of the commanders came and told us "You don't have to sleep [here] many days. You'll be allowed go back soon. You just came back with a few people and it's hard for us to provide security for you, and now we cannot take anymore."

I became a little bit happy while hearing this. However, if we aren't allowed to come back, we will continue to stay like this. We had to sleep [there] three days more. In the evening at 8:00 PM, a sergeant came and asked us, "Will you go back to your homes or go back to Thailand?"

I told him, "If you send us to our homes, we'll go back. We don't dare to go back to Thailand. we're afraid that Thai soldiers will arrest us again when we get inside Thailand. If they arrest us, we can't do anything."

They said that Thai soldiers wouldn't arrest us. I replied, "They won't arrest us? If they arrest us..."

Then, he said, "What are you afraid of if you stay here?"

I told him, "We're afraid of you, but we're afraid of everything else, like underground [landmines]."

When we first arrived, they said nice words to us. If we really had stayed there, we don't know how they'd have treated us later, because we can not read their minds. They called the children to watch movies. They fed us snacks and asked us to go and watch movies on the hill side. We didn't dare to go.

What is the column commander's name?

I don't know.

Did you have to stay in a terrible situation?

Yes.

When did you come back?

They would've sent us in the early morning, but one of the boats had no gas so they had to go and buy it. Therefore, we started to leave about 9:00 AM.

Did they [the people who took you to the boats] send you back?

Yes.

Did any of your children come back with you when you returned?

No, they didn't come back with me. One is staying with his teacher, another went to teach and the last one is studying in Mae La camp.

Were there any small children with you when you returned?

No, I don't have any, but my daughter-in-law has her child with us.

So, you didn't have any children with you when you returned?

Yes, but my son, the oldest one, followed us when we arrived at the other side of the river bank because he thought that we were going back without men, and people would make trouble to us.

How many people are there in the family which went back [destination not specified]?

Other people say four people.

Did Thai soldiers force you to go back?

I don't know because they didn't wear any army uniforms. They looked like civilians.

Have you seen them before?

I have seen the girl only once. For this man, he is a Karen Thai soldier. This man didn't go to the river bank. We don't know if the other four people who came to the river bank are soldiers or not.

When did people start forcing you to return?

Other people say it started on February 4th 2010.

How did they force you to return?

They went to tell [everyone] house by house. People became afraid and a group went back. Some people didn't dare to go to the river bank, but they said they sent them to Mae Tao or somewhere. They went to tell house by house, and a group by a group went back.

Did they go back on their own?

No, Thai soldiers came to pick them up from their houses.

What did they tell you when they came to your house?

They told me, "You didn't leave, yet?"

I asked them, "Why do I have to leave? If I have to leave, where do I have to go?"

They responded that we could stay only six months in that place. We were not allowed to stay there more than (6) months. After (6) months, they'd force all refugees to go back.

Then, I complained to them, "Where do we have to go and stay if you force us to go back? Where will you keep us? We don't have any places to go and stay."

Some people told them [the soldiers] that if they had to leave, give them 10000 [interviewee did not specify whether this was Baht or Kyat]. They told these people, "Leave, we'll give you cooking oil and a big tin of rice."

Only a big tin of rice isn't enough for us to eat. If they wanted to give us rice, they should've given [us] 10 or 20 sacks of rice so that we could eat for one or two days.

Who told you this?

Karen Thai soldiers told us. As for real Thai soldiers, they came and talked to us but we didn't understand them.

How many people were there when you came on that morning?

There were many people sitting and waiting for the truck there. Before we left, I don't know when it started, but since 1:00 AM, many Thai black rangers and Border Patrol Police went back and stayed in Noh Poe. In the morning, there were four Karen Thai soldiers that came to the camp and asked us to go back. I'd never seen them before. I've seen only the girl once or twice. We looked at them and they came straight to my house. I thought they'd just come and meet with me. Then, people came and told me to take our loads [belongings].

How many times do they come to the camp per day?

They came twice or three times to four times per day. Other people didn't come. There were only these four people who came to the camp. They asked us to go back and stay in Ler Per Her. Villagers told them that they didn't dare to go back and that they'd have difficulties to go back.

Where did these four people stay?

They stayed in the camp and waited.

Why did you come back after you arrived to the other side of the river bank?

We came back because we weren't happy and didn't dare to stay there.

Did you negotiate with the DKBA to come back?

We told them that we didn't dare to stay there anymore and we didn't dare to cultivate our hill fields, either. Even though they told us to stay and cultivate hill fields there, we didn't dare to. We also didn't dare to go anywhere. I think there are only a few people who have returned and everyone complained that they didn't dare to cultivate hill fields there. Then, it seemed they couldn't feed us and they let us come back.

Did DKBA soldiers often visit you when you returned?

They didn't come and talk to us. When I went to stay in the primary school, I saw their wives came and visited them. We just met their wives there. The afternoon that we were coming back, many of them, including their wives and children, came and watched movies in the army camp. They asked us to go and watch the movies but we didn't dare to go and watch. Then, they carried a television to our places and watched together with us.

How many DKBA wives did you see?

I saw ten of their wives.

Interview | Naw --- (female), Tha Song Yang District (February 17th 2010)

What is your name?

My name is M--- .

What village do you come from?

Wah Mee Hta.

What did you do when you lived there?

We did Hillside cultivation.

How many months has it been since you fled from there?

Six months.

Six months?

Yes, six months.

Now if people tell you that you have to go back, what will you do?

I can't do anything. If we go back we don't have food.

Is there anything else?

We don't dare to go back.

Why don't you dare to go back?

We're afraid of landmines.

There is no food, you're afraid of land mines; anything else?

Other things, I can't say. We can't go back because we haven't done anything, people planted mines when we left and there are many problems in the site we used to live.

Can you tell what other problems there are? You don't need to worry to tell it, aunt.

What are the other problems? Another problem is that people have to pay and give something. Those are the problems that we have. We don't have anything else, just that.

How many children do you have?

Three children, but just two now.

Why?

One is dead.

How long?

Over a year.

How about your husband?

Yes, there he is.

Where is he going now?

He's going to find vegetables.

Where does he go and find vegetables?

He goes and finds vegetables in Thoo Mwe Nee.

Does he dare to go across?

Yes, he dares to go across sometimes, but sometimes he doesn't dare to go across. He can go to the places where people live, but not the places where no people are.

What are you weaving?

Cloth.

What are you doing that for?

To wear it.

For your children to wear?

Yes, for my children to wear.

Where do you get thread from?

From Mae Taw.

How do you go there?

We go on this side; we go on Tee Nu Koh road.

Did you go on foot?

We went half on foot and half by car.

How much will you earn if you sell it, for one cloth?

I don't know. I've never sold it.

For example if you sell it?

It can get 100 or 150 baht.

Interview | Naw --- (female), Tha Song Yang District (February 17th 2010)

What is your name?

My name is Naw S---.

Which village did you come from?

Bap Nweh Bu.

Have you come during the fighting?

Yes,

How long have you lived here?

In the rainy season, we call it Dayh Hnya La.

How many months have you lived here?

I think nine months.

What did you do before you came here?

Farming.

Was that enough for you [to live]?

Yes, it was.

How about the food that they give you here?

They give food once a month. It's enough.

Now, let say for example can you go, and do you dare to go back, if you have to go?

No, [I] can't and don't dare to go back. There are still many landmines.

Mines, and what other problems if you have to go back?

Yes, there are problems because they are fighting under the ground. I have no idea.

If you go back now, can you do farming?

No.

Why?

Because there are landmines under the ground, we can't see them.

Have you ever gone back?

No, I have never gone back since I fled. Not only me, but also my children have never gone back.

So if people asked you to go back, you still wouldn't dare to go back?

No, I still wouldn't dare to go back.

What are the other things that would make you worry if you go back?

I worry that we will have to be afraid if they fight.

If there is fighting again?

Yes.

How about food, can you find any if you have to go back?

No, [I] can't find any.

Because there are still landmines?

Yes, there are still landmines.

How many children do you have?

I have 7 children.

Are they studying?

Yes, they are all studying.

What grades are they in?

Grades three, four, and five.

Are they still studying now?

Yes, here. People have set up a school.

So let's say, if you really had to go, you wouldn't dare to go?

No,

You can't go back?

No, I can't.

You can't dare to go back?

No, I can't dare to go back.

How about your other friends, what do they say about if they have to go back? Can they dare to go back?

I think, since there is still a problem they don't dare to go back now.

You said there are land mines in your village?

Yes, there are.

In Bap Nweh Bu?

Yes, in Bap Nweh Bu.

What is the village close to?

It's close to Mae La Ha and Mae Hkel.

Have there been any people who have gone back?

Yes, a few people went back to see their houses, whether they were burned or not. They followed just one road to see their houses. Even though they went back and saw their houses, they couldn't do anything. They had to come back.

Did they go back one by one?

Yes, they went and came back. They went back and saw if their houses were burned, and if the logs were stolen or destroyed. Some people lost their logs. They set up [their houses] with big logs. They couldn't do anything and they came back.

Who is still living in your village?

For me I can't guess, remember or know because I have never gone back.

How about people who went back? Did any of them stay living in their villages?

No, no one stayed. They just followed the path with closed eyes. Some people can't avoid land and have been injured by land mines.

How many people have you heard of who were injured by land mines?

There have been four or five people, including two of my nephews.

[Another interviewee] There have been about 6 or 7 people who have been injured by landmines. Two people have died.

Do you know their names?

Yes, I know. He's my cousin and his name is [asking another villager] what is the name of the person who was injured?

[Unidentified speaker] "Pa Y---"

[main speaker] We called him M---. He died here, and his funeral was done here. His daughter-in-law lives beside here.

[Unidentified speaker] He is a cousin of mine. He was injured yesterday.

So, how about if people force you to go back? What will you do?

We don't dare to go back and [we] can't do anything.

Even if people force you to go, you don't dare to go back?

No, [I] don't dare to go back. The problems will happen.

For example if the authorities come and tell you that you have to go back, what will you do?

We don't dare to go back, so we'll say we don't dare to go back.

Appendix 2: KHRG interviews with refugees in Tha Song Yang

Interview | Maung T--- (Male, 40), M--- village, Dta Greh Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 5th 2010)

Now Thai soldiers have ordered me to return to my village. They've come to stay around our refugee camp. They treat us roughly and don't allow us to go out from the camp. I'm not happy to stay here because of their actions.

If I have to return to my village, I won't have any food to eat and also won't have any security. And then it's not easy to find food in areas with landmines. And now, landmines have been laid in enemy areas including our village. I don't know who planted the landmines. Therefore, I dare not return to my village.

Since February 1st 2010 Thai military soldiers have come to stay around our camp. They don't allow us to go out. We should've got rations at the end of January but they did not provide us [with rations]. Usually, TBBC provides us rations at the end of the month. This month we got our rations on February 4th 2010 because of the Thai soldiers disturbing us. They told us we have to obey them. If we do as we want they will send us back to our village. But now they haven't sent us to our village yet. We don't know when they will send us back to our village.

I don't really want to go back. If the Thai soldiers send me to my village, I will return, but I've decided that I will find another place to live.

Interview | Saw T--- (male, 36), M--- village, Dta Greh Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 5th 2010)

Currently, Thai Soldiers have come to stay around us. We can't go out from the camp. They don't allow us to go out and travel to other places. I have to deal with this situation, so I'm not happy to stay here. But other people haven't moved to another place yet so I have to try to stay here. Even though I don't want to stay here, I can't do anything on my own.

Recently, Thai soldiers said that if we return to our village, TBBC will provide us food for six months. But now we don't hear the Thai soldiers saying anything [about TBBC support] to us. We can't return without getting food. There is no food or security in our village. We're also afraid of landmines. It won't be easy for us to find food if we are returned [to our villages].

On February 3rd 2010 Thai soldiers came to stay in our refugee camp. And around 10 o'clock in the morning they gathered people in the camp. Men, women and children had to stay under the sun. They checked household registrations and the number of people for providing food. We had to stay under the sun till the evening. They said, "It will be the last time for you getting food from us. You have to return to your village, and we will never provide you rations again."

We've decided that we won't return. If we can't go out from the camp secretly, we'll have to follow other people to the other side of the river. If I arrive in my village, I will stay in my village for a few days. After that I'll have to find a place to live and do new work.

Interview | Naw T--- (female, 50), W--- village, --- Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 5th 2010)

I don't want to go back now but the Thai soldiers don't allow me to stay here. I don't know what I should do. I am hopeless. It depends on other whether they [the other refugees] go or stay. We will follow them.

How can I dare to go back to my village? Landmines often explode [there]. Sometimes, the villagers are injured by landmines. Therefore, we have just heard this news [that the refugees will be returned] and we are already afraid. There is no security and no food for us.

On February 3rd 2010, Thai soldiers called us to meet with them. They cooked us [made us stand] in the sun. They checked each person and each group for an hour. It took a long time. It didn't finish until 2pm.

I don't want to go back to the village I abandoned. However, during the rainy season if I have to live in a refugee camp I will cultivate the fields in my village. If we can raise some crops, it will be good to go back and live in my village, in the summer. But if I go back now, I won't have any food to eat.

Interview | Naw T--- (female, 55), K---, --- Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 5th 2010)

I now suffer the same as when I lived in my village, which was why I came to a refugee camp. Even though it's not a civil war, it's as rough as a civil war. When we come and live in another country, they can do anything to us. But if they had sympathy, they wouldn't treat us like this.

I don't have any food in my village. We have no land. We have no security. If I don't go back, it will be good for me.

Thai soldiers have come to stay around our camp and tell us different things every day and night. They always pressure us to go back. But there is no exact information about sending us back yet. We just have to wait and listen for the news.

For me, I don't want to go back any more. If I go back, how can I work? I don't dare travel. There is no field to cultivate. It'll be very difficult for me. The work that we usually do is cultivating fields. If we are really forced to go back, I won't go back. If they send me back to the other side of the river, I will find a way by myself and come back to stay in a Karen village in Thailand.

Interview | Naw K--- (female, 37), K--- village, Lu Pleh Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 2nd 2010)

Yesterday and today Thai authorities told us that we can't stay here anymore. I will have to suffer difficulties one more time. When I couldn't stay in my own village, I thought I could have stable living conditions if I entered and stayed in a refugee camp in Thailand. But now I suffer from the Thai authorities deporting me and their oppression is not different from the DKBA and SPDC.

For the time being, I don't know what to do. I absolutely dare not go back to my old village. I have no friends and relatives to stay with in Thai Karen villages. On both sides of the area [the

Burma and Thai border], I can't find a safe place for me to stay. I am still waiting to see what will happen after when we receive our rations and after February 15th the refugees will spread out to different locations. I have to look for a place to stay in one location.

Thai military soldiers told us that, "If you go back and stay in your own village, the DKBA and SPDC will not do anything to you. If you do not go back, we will ask big trucks to come pick you up and throw you all into the sea." The Thai authorities who often come are soldiers in black uniforms at Noh Boh and some times this has included the Thai border patrol police. They come three times a day. Starting on the 1st of February 2010, at 10am, and between 5pm and 8pm.

My current family attitude is: we don't want to go back to our village. Because, in the past, I couldn't live anymore in my village and I came to Thailand to stay in the refugee camp. If I go back again, it is like I will go back and be a slave for the SPDC and DKBA again.

Interview | Saw P--- (Male, 38), W--- village, Dta Greh Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 2nd 2010)

[The] Thais force us to leave --- camp and I have to go back to my village but I dare not go back. My relatives contacted me and said, 'Now the surrounding area close to your village is full of landmines and we do not know who and which groups planted the landmines. No one witnessed who planted the landmines. For this reason, do not come back at this time. If it is possible try to look for a suitable place for you there [in Thailand].'

If I go back now, I don't know the way to go back. Since when I came and stayed here, I have not gone back. I don't know if people use the old road or the new road. I do not have food there. I don't think that I can go back and stay peacefully. No one will take responsibility for our security.

Thai authorities told us, "Now you can go back and stay in your village. The DKBA and SPDC will not frighten you anymore." They told us that we couldn't stay here anymore: "You can go back by yourselves. No need for us to send you back. But if you are injured or killed by landmines or if something happens to you, that is not concern with us. That is your fortune." [They came on] February 1st at 10 am and at 5pm.

I don't want to go back. If I go back, I won't have food, shelter and there is no security for me in my village.

Interview | Saw M--- (male, 40), Bp--- village, Dta Greh Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 2nd 2010)

Now the Thai authorities came and forced us to go back and I am afraid of them very much. I dare not go anywhere now. They [will] force us to leave. The latest [they will force us to leave] is February 15th 2010. I made up my mind to go back and stay in one of the villages for a short time and when the rainy season comes, I will stay in one of the villages in Thailand.

I don't want to go back. There is no one to provide security for us. I made up my mind that I will not go back and stay in my village because of the current situation. I will stay in Thailand in one of the other places.

Thai army scouts came and told us that we can't stay here anymore. "If we can't make you to leave, we will send you all to Myawaddy," said army sergeant Pi Teh. I think, the DKBA gave money to this man and asked him to do this. During January he came to the camp everyday, especially on February 1st and 2nd he came three times a day. The time he normally comes is 10am, 5pm and 8pm.

I don't want to go back to my village now. If I go back, I will not able to work for my livelihood very well and that is why I made up my mind that I will not go back.

Interview | Naw P--- (female, 40), Gk--- village, Lu Pleh Township. (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 2nd 2010)

The difficulty I suffer now is a miserable thing for me. I can't live in --- refugee camp anymore. If I go outside the camp, I can't think of where I will go and live. If I go back, I am afraid of the SPDC, DKBA and landmines. I can't figure out what to do.

If I go back to my village, I will have to do forced labour for the SPDC and DKBA: clear rubber plantation areas, clear the [military] camp compounds, be their messengers if they need people to put things on the trucks or bring rice sacks down off the trucks or other equipments. I will have to go and do that as emergency work. There is no good security condition for me. Anytime they need something, I dare not do it. But I can't refuse to go. I always have to go.

The Thai army Black Rangers told us that we couldn't stay here anymore. On February 1st 2010 they told us, "You all must leave." I told them, "If we have to leave, it is better we leave the camp after we receive the rations. Now we don't have any food from last month." They asked, "When will you received the rations?" I told them we usually received rations at the end of the month. And they replied, "You can't do that. The latest day for you to leave is February 15th 2010. You all must leave the camp." I couldn't say anything anymore. They continued and said, "If you do not listen to us, we will send you to Myawaddy."

I made up my mind that I will not go back to my village. It is difficult for me to go back. It is not easy for me to go back. I think, I will look for place to stay here in Thailand that is suitable for me and if I am not able to do that, I will go back and stay in the Karen State in another location. I know that I can't stay but I will stay with a bad feeling. Now I strongly have hope, my country will find peace and I can go back and stay in my village peacefully.

Interview | Saw M--- (Male, 55), M--- village, Dta Greh Township. (Tha Song Yang New Arrival Site, February 13th 2010)

I suffered the Thai soldiers making restrictions on the refugees more and more. We couldn't travel here and there, just in the close area here and to look for vegetables for our families. They don't like us to go to Oo Thu Klo rivers too. They started make this restriction from last three or four day. Moreover they forced the huts that located under the rocky mountain to the main area in the clinic compound.

The Thai people told us you should not go back to the other side of the river. We will have a household registration for every family that stays here. Those people will get rations. People who do not have a chance to take a household registration will not be provided with rations. Now some families they see other families go back so they want to go back too. If the Thais continue to restrict us it will not be easy for us to stay. The Thais said that if we don't want to

stay here we can go back, but we will not arrange food for you. People who take a household registration photo will get food, people who do not will not get any food.

For me, I don't want to go anywhere now. If the leaders can arrange for us to still live here I will stay here. If they cannot, I think I will go back because if the situation continues like this, we will not be able to stay. If we stay here is like we are under arrest in our house.

Interview | Naw C--- (Female, 38), M--- village, Dta Greh Township. (Tha Song Yang New Arrival Site, February 13th 2010)

Now I feel that the Thai will make restrictions on us until we cannot live here. They do not like us to go outside. We have to go in and out. In the past, the place like the area under the rocky mountain, those houses cannot stay there anymore. They all had to move. Now we cannot go outside to look for vegetables for our family. We have to stay in our hut all day long. Their roof is made of plastic and inside is very hot. It is no different than staying in the sun. Our skin is burning hot and so is our heart.

Now the Thai authorities are always watching us. People who go around in the camp, they always watch the situation. They check people's activity. If the villagers gather together to sit and chat, if they Thai soldiers see they come and ask what we are talking about. If what we are talking about is strange to them, they make a note. That is why we dare not even gather and talk. We stay at our house so the Thais will not watch us.

Concerning this issue, we will listen to what our elders tell us. We will stay here with strength. If people do not go anywhere, I will not go also. I will stay here with strength.

Appendix 3: KCBOERC interviews with refugees in Tha Song Yang

Interview | Naw K--- (female, 37), L--- village, Dta Greh Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 5th 2010)

I left [my original village] because I worry about attacks, shooting, mortar fire, also afraid of rape, killing, forced labour. I have been a porter many times in the past. I do not want to return.

I am afraid of landmines, traps with sharpened bamboo sticks, conscription of my son, forced portering, [being] forced to walk on the front line ahead of troops. Also rice tax. We are not free to leave and work because we are under DKBA control.

I know many families in Nong Bua. I do not know of anyone that wants to return. The Thai military has been pressuring us to go back. They come every morning and every evening, and tell us we can't stay. 'Why are you afraid?' they say. 'The DKBA are Karen also.'

Today three families I know were sent back even though they did not want to go back. The Thai military asked the camp leader to get the families together. The Thai military car took them outside the camp."

Interview | Naw P--- (female, 38), L--- village, Dta Greh Township (Tha Song Yang new arrival site, February 5th 2010)

We know that the DKBA, for every three boys, one has to join their army, or pay 200,000 kyat per year.

I do not want to go back [to LPH]. I know many families [in Nong Bua]. Everyone wants to stay.

My cousin was trying to find his animals [in LPH]. On his third trip, he stepped on a landmine. He was sent to a Thai hospital and returned with an above the knee amputation.

The Thai military pressures us to leave. They come every day, and say, 'You cannot stay here.'

Interview | Saw --- (male), (January 31st 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

Pressure has been made while we are here. They [Thai soldiers] are coming almost every day and pushing us to go back to the Ler Per Her side.

As for me I made up my mind to be strong and ignore and face this pressure. But for our innocent people they can't stand this daily pressure and it might lead some into stress. Some families are secretly moving out at night.

We once heard that we all had to move to Mae La camp and everybody agreed to this. But later they said that you are not allowed to move to Mae La camp. But you all have to go back to Burma side.

There are many problems if we go back to our village. How can we go back among the landmines?

The last time when we met them [Thai military] they asked us about how many houses are left in Ler Per Her village and accidentally, the head of Ler Per Her village answered that there are estimated 30 houses left in the village. Then they got that point and said that, the villagers who still have the house in Ler Per Her village have to go first.

Nobody has tried to clear the landmines for us. We have only walked on small paths. We dare not go beside the path.

Beside the camp, they army are around us. They do not let the villagers go outside, we can go out of the camp just the between 3 PM and 5 PM. A few days ago they don't even let us go to fetch the water and take bath out side.

The Thai soldiers say, "we asked you to go back, if you do not go back, we will come with the big truck and send you directly to Myawaddy." We are now like a visitor in the other people's houses, we need to be patient under the house owner.

The deadline is the 15th of February. We all must leave No Boh temporary shelter camp. Nobody can stay or be left behind. We have stayed at No Boh camp since June, we do not have a chance to work on our farm or field because we have to flee from our home town. If others don't still provide foods and other supplies, we can't make a living by our own.

The children haven't finished the school yet. If they go back, there might be the landmine victims among them. We really worry about that. Recently, the landmines and the pungisticks were not remove from the land yet... I asked the Thai soldiers that because there are many children, if the children were injured by the landmines and died, what can we do? They answered, "if the children die, you can make more children." Another point that they say to us is, "Go back and register all your names to Ler Per Her. Let your children and wives come and get the food regularly."

Please look after us if we are going back. Don't leave us and ignore us. Even if we go back to the other side, we are full of worry and sadness. We are really helpless people as you all have learned.

Interview | Villager (January 31st 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

Two days ago I went back to my old place inside Burma and it was 28 January 2010. According to the Thai Army command, we had to go back and check our old houses and belongings. We could only go around our old house areas – we dared not go any further because of landmines. All the women are worrying for their children

Our houses were burned down and some of them they destroyed it and get the pole and sell it or get the roofs of our house to build their buildings, just a few houses left. We can do nothing; we could not live anywhere in the world.

The Thai soldiers come and ask three or four times a day, day and night. If people say that they will go, they tried to move fast and come with the car to send us direct to the other side. They were so happy when they had a chance to send people back, but when they come and ask but people refuse to go, their faces are not good.

We don't know why they are now around the camp, they just let us go outside for taking bath or carry water during the evening from 3 to 5 PM. We have some wells in the camp but the water is not enough for everyone so we have to go to the village or the temple outside of the camp.

If we go back, the DKBA is not a problem because they are our people and they told us that we can go back, but there are some [inaudible], like landmines or Pungistick. That told us that we cannot go to the other side of the ball ground, because there are landmines, the soldier who set it up, are gone away, so we don't know where they are.

There are another problems, if we go back we dare not go outside of the village to get the bamboos, the trees or the leaves for the roof of our houses, they told us that, you can get those things from the Thai side. OK if we can get it from the Thai side, it is not a problem. But we couldn't even go to the jungle to get vegetables for our families.

The DKBA themselves, they dare not go anywhere, just follow the path to go around. When we go to meet with them, we have to use that path only.

Interview | Naw S--- (female), P--- village (January 31st 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

I have been here in --- since May 2009. Before I came here, I was in my village working in my field to earn our living.

We cannot go back because there are a lot of landmines. There are many troubles because they still fighting. We really afraid of there might be a fighting.

I have 7 children and they are all learning in the school. I never go back to my village since I left, there are some people who go back to check for their houses. They just followed the path, they dare not go beside the path. They go back and check their house if they were burned or destroy, or if their plant were took away or and then come back. They dare not stay there any longer.

There are six or seven people who were injured by the land mines and two people died from the landmines. They were my cousins. Two of them died straight away and they were buried around here.

We dare not go back to our village cause of the landmines. If people force me, I will tell the truth that I dare not go back to my village.

Interview | Naw M--- (female), W--- village (January 31st 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

I am a farmer when I was in my village, I was here for 6 months. I cannot go back to my village because we have no food with us and there are a lot of landmines under the ground.

Interview | Naw K--- (female), K--- village (January 31st 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

I have 3 children, and I came here since the fighting began. Now I dare not go back to my village because I have seen that some people who go back they were died or lost their legs.

My brother was injured by the landmine losing one of his leg when he go back to his house. He stepped on the landmine beside P'Nweh Pu village about one and a half month ago in December 2009, while he went back with his brother-in-law. He died on the way to Mae Sot

hospital. We won't go back if we were force back, because we're afraid of Landmines. You can't make a living, to find and to grow foods.

Interview | A---, M--- village (January 31st 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

We can't make our living if we go back now. But we heard that the Thai Black soldiers will forced us to go back by tomorrow. There are many problems because we cannot go around. How can we make our living?

Interview | T---, M--- village (January 31st 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

I'm a farmer when I was in Mae La Ah, I have 3 children and I was here since the fighting start. I dare not go back to my village because of the landmines so we will stay here. We do not have food to eat when we go back.

Interview | Saw G--- (male, 41), M--- village, Dta Greh Township (January 27th 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

If the Thai authorities really send us back, I will not go back because I know now the DKBA treatment of the villagers. They use nice words but they are just good for listening [to]. Before I fled to Thailand, during the summer time, I had to do forced labour such as constructing roads, building fences around the army camps, build a place for rice storage, carrying rations and cutting wood for them. And during the rainy season, we have to make thatch shingles and roofing for them. When I am not home, if it is my turn to send rations, my son who is 13 years old can go instead of me. But if I am ordered to go and do construction [while I am away], my son is too young to do that so my wife has to hire people...[and this] is a lot of money for me.

If I have to go back, I am sure that I will have to suffer the same kinds of abuses. For me, I can go and stay anywhere along the border here but I don't want to leave my family and stay alone. I would like to stay with all the people here. Here in --- [temporary site in Tha Song Yang], we already have shelters to stay in, so we would like the leaders to discuss and continue to let us stay here for the next hot season and rainy season. If they can't let us stay here, I would like the leaders to organize a place for us to stay or send us to the camp, we are willing to go to that place.

Interview | Saw S--- (male, 27), P--- village, Dta Greh Township (January 27th 2010, new arrival site, Thailand)

If the Thai authorities send us back to Ler Per Her, I have made up my mind that I will not go back. This is because the DKBA said they will stay hand in hand with the KNLA but I dare not believe them because the DKBA officer who is sitting in the meeting yesterday is not the higher officer. He is Saw Bpweh Gkay, company commander from DKBA Brigade #999 Battalion #7. For the future, I would like the leaders to organise a place for us to stay or send us to a camp within this hot season. For me, I cannot go to a Thai village here to stay because I do not have friends who I know here. We already suffered a lot in the first round of the rainy season and if I have to suffer during the next round of the rainy season, I will go crazy.

Appendix 4: AIPMC Interview Report

Baan Nong Bua and Baan Usu Tha, Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province (Censored and used with permission)

Date of interview: February 3rd - 4th, 2010

Interviewer: Aticha Wongwian, Country Coordinator, ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC)

Interviewees: Seven refugees from Nong Bua displacement site and Usu Tha displacement site, Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province

Venue: The interviewer was not allowed to enter the displacement sites. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in different places out of the sites, away from the monitoring of the army:

1. A house in Nong Bua village
2. A hut nearby the road to Mae Usu Cave
3. Mae Tao Clinic

Language used in the interviews: Thai, English and Karen (Some of the refugees could speak a little Thai.)

Interpreters (Karen-English, English-Karen): Karen staffs from Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) and Mae Tao Clinic as named below.

1. Mr. Mahn Mahn (BPHWT)
2. Ms. Shu Ma (BPHWT)
3. Ms. Sophia (Mae Tao Clinic)

Main questions used in the interviews:

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Please tell me the current situation inside the displacement site.
3. Would you like to return to your homeland? Why?
4. When do you plan to return home?
5. Any of your neighbors want to return to their homeland at this moment? What are their reasons?
6. How do you feel to learn that the Thai authorities will send you back home very soon?
7. Anything else you would like to tell me?

Introduction:

In June 2009, the war between Karen National Union (KNU) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), with the backing of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) / Burmese military regime, took place in Karen State, Myanmar. Across the Moei River bordering Thailand and Burma, the conflict area was opposite to Thailand's Tha Song Yang District in Tak Province. Due to the fights, an estimated three thousands Karen refugees fled to Thailand. They were temporary permitted to stay and to build temporary shelters in areas along the Thai – Burma border in Tha Song Yang. The smaller groups were eventually collapsed and combined with the bigger groups in Nong Bua and Usu Tha. According to the refugees who were interviewed, refugees in Usu Tha site were from DKBA based areas but refugees in Nong Bua

site were from Ler Per Her Internal Displacement Person (IDP) camp located on the other side of the Moei River, opposite Nong Bua. The IDP camp combined people who fled from other conflict areas in Burma. The camp was once a KNU base but came under DKBA control when they won the fights in June 2009.

Seven months after the refugees' arrival, the Thai military and authorities decided not to rotate the refugees to any of the present refugee camps. The military publicly announced that the Thai government did not have a policy to accept any more refugees to the camps and that the refugees had to be all repatriated to their homeland in Burma. It was also announced that the first group of refugees to be voluntarily repatriated, as claimed by the military, was a group of 30 families and the repatriation would start on February 5th, 2010. Media, refugee advocacy and protection organizations and interested persons were invited to observe.

The series of interviews below were conducted on February 3rd and 4th, 2010 as a part the survey/preparation trip for AIPMC's annual border mission to be held in March 2010. The purpose of the interviews was to identify the current situation of refugees in the displacement sites as well as their opinions and concerns on the repatriation.

Background of the interviewed refugees:

There were seven refugees interviewed: five men from Nong Bua site, a man and a woman from Usu Tha, and an NGO staff who worked closely to the refugees.

Refugees from Nong Bua:

- 1) Mr. A---
- 2) Mr. B---
- 3) Mr. C---
- 4) Mr. D---
- 5) Mr. E---

Refugees from Usu Tha:

- 1) Mr. F---
- 2) Ms. G---

Involved NGO worker:

- 1) Mr. Mahn Mahn, Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT)

Findings:

The findings presented in this report are based on information given by the interviewed refugees mentioned above only. In this section, the current situation of the refugees in Nong Bua and Usu Tha displacement sites and the refugees' opinions and concerns regarding their return to Burma will be elaborated.

Current situation:

According to the interviews, the refugees in both Nong Bua and Usu Tha displacement sites were told by the Thai military that all of them would be definitely repatriated very soon. However, the situation in Nong Bua seemed worse than in Usu Tha because the repatriation of Nong Bua refugees was set to begin in the coming few days while there was not yet the date set for the people in Usu Tha (Mr. F---, 3 February 2010). Mr. A--- and Mr. B--- said that the refugees were told that the first batch had to leave on 5th of February 2010 and all of them would be sent home by 15 February 2010 (Mr. A--- and Mr. B---, 3 February 2010). This was

confirmed by Mr. C--- and Mr. E--- who are among those asked by the military to return on the 5th (Mr. C--- and Mr. E---, 3 February 2010).

Because of the forthcoming repatriation, Nong Bua displacement site was full of frustration and fear. "The situation is very difficult. We're so confused and do not know what to do. We're scared of going back there but they (the military) say we have to go back." (Mr. B---, 3 February 2010). The situation worsened when the refugees were pressured by the Thai military (the black rangers) to willingly return home. There were different kinds of pressure placed by the Thai military: verbal pressure, limitation of aid and food such as prohibition of running schools and health center in the camp and restriction of entering and exiting the sites.

1. Verbal pressure / coercion

In both displacement sites, verbal pressure / coercion was placed in the form of attempts to repeatedly convince the refugees to return home and to blame them for staying. However, verbal harassment was only found in Nong Bua, of which the repatriation date was announced.

"They (the military) told us that we could not stay here, that we had to go home. There's nothing on the other side, no more fighting. It's time for us to go back. They said something like this over and over every day." (Mr. A---, 3 February 2010)

"The military told me every day that I have to go back. They said the situation on the other side is good and asked why I'm still here and why don't I go home... I was told that I would be deported to Myawaddee (SPDC based area) if I don't return home." (Mr. C---, 3 February 2010)

"If we don't go back, they (the military) said, we would be sent to Myawaddee. I was told this twice a day..." (Mr. E---, 3 February 2010)

2. Limitation of aid

Mr. D--- said medics are not permitted to bring a certain amount of medicines into the camp if it looked too much to the authorities. Moreover, the health center was not allowed to be run since the beginning of the year. Lately, the roof of the center's hut was taken away (Mr. D---, 3 February 2010). Moreover, Mr. C---, elaborated that since January 2010, the only temporary school in the camp was forced to close down by the military. The roof of the school hut had also been taken away (Mr. C---, 3 February 2010).

According to Mr. F---, the refugees in the site were not pressured as much as those in Nong Bua. They still received necessary aid. The school and health center in the site are still functioning (Mr. F---, 3 February 2010).

3. Limitation of acquiring food

From the interviews, the refugees from both sites faced limitation of acquiring food. According to Mr. B---, Mr. F--- and Mahn Mahn, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) was responsible for food support and distribution since the early days of the camp. However, recently, the military took control of food distribution and acquiring food became restricted among the refugees since then (Mr. B---, Mr. F--- and Mahn Mahn, 3 February 2010).

This problem was clearly related to problems of refugee registration. Mahn Mahn, a staff from the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) - an organization that provided health care for the refugees - explained that NGOs such as TBBC and BPHWT had registered the refugees on their own. For example, when BPHWT provided health care to the refugees the organization registered their patients and recorded the numbers of persons who came for their services. TBBC also had its own registered number of refugees. The number of refugees declared by both TBBC and BPHWT were much higher than the number claimed by the military. This is a common understanding among NGO workers and the refugees. Problems arise when the military distribute food according to their 'official' registration list, a large number of refugees could not acquire food because they were not registered by the military (Mahn Mahn, 3 February 2010).

It appears that the food limitation issue results from problems of registration. However, for some refugees, they felt that this was part of the pressure from the army. Mr. C--- said that he thought the military intentionally added pressure to the refugees by ignoring the obvious fact that not everyone had been registered.

“When I came for the registration, the army said it was enough to register only the house leader, no need to register every person in the household. Now they say they will only give food to people who had their photo taken (registered). This is ridiculous.” (Mr. C---, 3 February 2010)

“The military said people who did not register cannot get food. We all know that not everyone got registered. They (the military) just pretend not to know this. All they want is to pressure us to go home.” (Mr. B---, 3 February 2010)

Food restrictions are an effective way to force the refugees back home. Mr. C--- emotionally explained the situation he was facing regarding food restriction.

“I have fifteen abandoned children living with me, but I only got food for 1 person. The food will finish tomorrow, and the next day they (the military) said we had to return home. I agree. We really have to go home because we do not have anything to eat here.” (Mr. C---, 3 February 2010)

4. Restriction of travel

Although restrictions on entering and exiting the sites is the common practice of both Nong Bua and Usu Tha sites, it is noted by the interviewed refugees that it was much stricter recently following the announcement on the repatriation.

In relating the problem of acquiring food, as elaborated above, the refugees admitted they sometimes had to, in the past, go out of the site to feed their families. Prior to this, the refugees could sometimes leave the camp to secure food / livelihood. However, at the time being, all of the interviewed refugees, both of those from Nong Bua and Usu Tha, confirmed that nobody was permitted to neither enter nor exit the camp without the military's permission. Whether intentionally or not, this kind of restriction created huge pressures to the refugees. Moreover, it provides an excuse for the military to delete refugees, whom do not comply with the restrictions, off their list.

“We're allowed to go out only 2 hours a day if the officers agree on our reason to go. The camp closes at 2 PM every day. If we do not come back on time, our names will be cut out of the list. Then when we come back, they do not allow us to enter the site and we cannot get the food. Therefore, the list of refugees the military is holding shorter and shorter” (Mr. B---, 3 February 2010)

Mr. F--- also added that not many people were allowed to go out. Only a few people a day (Mr. F---, 3 February 2010).

Mahn Mahn from BPHWT also supported Mr. F--- statement on the restriction that the officers were so strict that they did not allow his staff to take a serious patient out of Mae Usu site to have medical care in Tha Song Yang Hospital a few days ago. (Mahn Mahn, 3 February 2010).

It is quite apparent from the interviews that these situations, in the displacement sites, are extremely worrying and the refugees are feeling very tense and vulnerable, especially in Nong Bua, because of the coming repatriation. As the military claims that the refugees will return to Burma on a voluntary basis, they have tried in many ways to make the refugees feel afraid and uncomfortable to stay in the site, forcing them to agree to an eventual return.

The interviewer finds, based on the interviews and further information gathered from various interactions, these refugees are placed under duress. And this - regardless of the military's intention - affect the refugees' decision-making in terms of 'voluntary repatriation'.

This, according to Mr. A---, breaks a refugee's will, forcing some to give up hope and accede to the demands of the Thai military and eventually return to conflict areas in Burma (Mr. A---, 3 February 2010). Some refugees are forced to choose to run away from this difficult situation. Mr. B--- added that a lot of refugees have recently left the site quietly because they did not want to be sent back to Burma or to Myawaddee. He said despondently, "20 families have disappeared ... I don't know where they are. In the jungle, I guess" (Mr. B---, 3 February 2010).

Refugees' opinions and concerns on returning to Burma

This section will illustrate the opinions and concerns of the interviewed refugees regarding a return home to Burma. **From the interviews, none of the refugees stated that they wanted to return at this period of time.** Almost all of them said they would definitely go back if it was safe enough for them and they could manage to live the same lives, as in the past, before the fighting broke out.

"They want to go back but nobody wants to go now. It's not safe."
(Mr. A---, 3 February 2010)

"I will go back home if it is safe. You don't have to help me carry my things. I can do it on my own. Just for now, don't force me back to that dangerous place." (Mr. C---, 3 February 2010)

"I want to go back to take care of my house but it's not safe right now." (Mrs. G---, 4 February 2010)

"I have no problem going back. It's just not the right time to go. It's really not safe. I did see it for myself." (Mr. E---, 3 February 2010)

"Please do not pressure us to go back right now. Do give us options." (Mr. D---, 3 February 2010)

"When it's safe, I'm ready to go back." (Mr. F---, 3 February 2010)

Most of their concerns are for their safety and sustainability of livelihood. Other major concerns mentioned by the refugees are: landmines, forced labour, taxation and a lack of food and shelter.

1. Landmines

Landmines are one of the biggest concerns among the refugees. The refugees know very well that landmines are heavily implanted all over the area. Until now, nothing or nobody has been able to guarantee their safety from those landmines.

Mrs. G---, a victim of landmine, agreed to be interviewed. She was sitting on the bed with her 15-day-old baby lying next to her. She stepped on a landmine 15 days ago. She was pregnant for 8 months at that time. Her baby was removed from her womb when she reached the hospital. She lost half of her foot in the incident. The remaining part of her foot was still under bandage. Mrs. G---'s injury and resulting early delivery has not allowed her to breast-feed her baby and she does not have any money to even buy instant milk powder for her child. She detailed the incident as below.

"I was asked by neighbors to go back to take their cows. I went back with my husband. One of the cows ran off the pathway so I followed to get it back. That's when it happened..." (Mrs. G---, 4 February 2010).

Mr. B---, Mr. E--- and Mr. C--- were among the refugees who were taken by the Thai military to see the area in Burma to where the group would be repatriated. The military claimed that the area was safe from landmines. However, the refugees did not feel it was safe.

"I saw the place. They only gave us one track to walk. We cannot walk off the track. Our safety is not guaranteed...I have three little kids. How can I tell them to stay only in the house and watch them all the time and prevent them from playing away from the safe track?" (Mr. B---, 3 February 2010)

“We have to stay in the house and walk on the safe path only. It is impossible. We need to farm and plant” (Mr. E---, 3 February 2010)

According to the refugees, landmines can be found everywhere in the area. Although there was a safe area, it is limited and not enough for them to make their living.

2. Forced labor and taxation

There were also concerns on forced labour and taxation among the refugees in Nong Bua. It was obvious that the refugees in Nong Bua were worried to go back to Ler Per Her, of which once was under KNU but now controlled by DKBA (whom they oppose). They did not trust the DKBA who claim they will not force them to work to pay taxes.

“They (DKBA) just say it (that they will not tax or force labour). They will do it for sure. We hear of it a lot. They force people to pay once or twice a month” (Mr. A---, 3 February 2010)

3. Lack of food and shelter

The refugees were also worried about food and shelters. All of the interviewed refugees asked for food support if they were to be repatriated. It is impossible for them to plant or farm in a land filled with landmines.

As for shelter, Mr. B---, Mr. E--- and Mr. C---, who were taken to see their old village, found that there were only 30 houses left from 200 houses before. The rest were all burned in fire set by DKBA. (Mr. B---, Mr. E--- and Mr. C---, 3 February 2010). Therefore, the refugees who return home would need to rebuild their houses. However, it will be impossible for them to build houses as Karen traditional houses were built from wood and leaves. “How can I find wood and leaves when I can’t go to the jungle? It’s full of landmines” (Mr. B---, 3 February 2010)

Suggestions and requests from the refugees:

1. They should not be forced back to their homeland, at this period of time, based on the fact that the area is full of landmines.
2. They prefer any other options except going back. They are willing to move to other places that will not create any problems to the Thai community in the area. (Mr. B--- and Mr. D---, 3 February 2010)

Conclusion:

The refugee situation in Nong Bua and Usu Tha displacement sites is a big concern, especially in Nong Bua, where the repatriation is said to begin in a few days. The pressure placed on refugees by the Thai military, whether intentional and un-intentional, is creating an adverse and detrimental climate / results for the refugees. Refugees are being consciously coerced or forced, in some way or other, to return to a dangerous conflict zone. Those ‘voluntarily’ returning to Burma are doing so under duress and without much choice. Some refugees are afraid and frustrated of being forced to return that they run away from the camp sites. The main concerns and fears of refugees with regards to returning home are: landmines, forced labour, taxation and food and shelter. They are appealing to the authorities and concern parties not to return them at the present moment. They are willing to move to other locations in Thailand or elsewhere, but not to Burma. However, they are willing to return home when the situation is safe and conducive in their homeland.

Appendix 5: Refugee landmine victims

No.	Details
1	On January 18 th , 2010 at 1 pm, Naw M---, age 30, stepped on a landmine in a farm field near Mae La Ah Hta village, Dta Greh Township. Naw M--- had been residing in the Oo Thu Hta new arrival site in Tha Song Yang District, but had returned to check on livestock left behind when she fled. She lost part of her left foot and had to be treated in Thailand. Naw M--- was in her third trimester of pregnancy and doctors in Thailand had to perform an emergency caesarean section to save her child.
2	On January 15 th , 2010, Saw P---, age 30, from the Nong Bua site, stepped on a landmine at his farm near Kleh Poe Kloe village, Dta Greh Township. Saw P--- had returned to check on livestock that he had abandoned when he fled. He lost his leg from the knee down and received treatment at the Mae Sot Hospital, in Thailand.
3-	<p>On November 19th 2009, Saw N---, age 23, from the Nong Bua site stepped on a landmine between Kleh Poe Kloe Village and Mae Keh Key Village; in Dta Greh Township. He returned to his village to check on his land and on the way back to camp detonated the mine. He sustained significant injuries to his legs, torso, arms, and face, impairing his vision and mobility. He was treated at Mae Tan Hospital.</p> <p>Saw Eh Nge, the Nong Bua, clinic coordinator: "I saw Saw N's.... family carrying him on a stretcher down the road. So we picked him up and drove him to Mae La for treatment."</p>
4-	<p>On November 17th 2009, Saw P---, age 48, had returned to check on his farmland near Mae Lar Ah Villag, Dta Greh Township when he stepped on a mine and lost his right leg stepped. He died from massive blood loss before he was able to be transferred to Mae Tao clinic for treatment.</p> <p>Thai Karen Villager, Saw Tee Lay, who was called to the Mae Ou So camp to transport the victim: "I was called to be a driver, but when I arrived, he was already dead."</p>
5-	On September 21 st 2009, Saw S---, age 39, from the Nong Bua site, had returned to check on the property near Pu Lu Plaw Village, Dta Greh Township. He lost his left leg from his knee down and was treated at the trauma center in Mae La Refugee Camp.
6-	On September 17 th Saw G---, age 13, stepped on a landmine in a farm field near Mae La Ah Hta village, Dta Greh Township. Like Naw M---, he had returned to tend to livestock left behind by his family when they fled to Oo Thu Hta. Saw G--- was treated in Thailand and lost his left leg.
7	In late July, Saw Hs---, age 43, was killed after stepping on a landmine near Mae La Ah Kee village, Dta Gre Township.
8	In early July, Saw ---, age unknown, stepped on a landmine near War Mee Gklah village, Dta Greh Township. Saw --- had been conscripted as a forced labourer for DKBA soldiers and stepped on the mine after returning to his village. After stepping on the mine he was removed by DKBA soldiers and the extent of his injuries are not known.
9	In the second week of June, Saw M---, age 27, was killed after stepping on a landmine on a trail between Bp'Nweh Bpoo and Mae La Ah Kee villages, Dta Greh Township.

Appendix 6: ICBL Statement regarding demining in the area of return

February 16th 2010

I have no knowledge of any statement by the Thai military that demining will or has taken place. As the International Campaign to Ban Landmines research focal point for Burma/Myanmar, and as an appointed voluntary advisor to the Royal Thai Army's Mine Action Centre, I can say for sure that the Thai military is not involved in any demining activity in that area.

Some Thai military officer may have received some assurances, from some entity in Burma, that mines would be cleared. A knowledgeable Thai military officer would know this is a meaningless assertion. The Thai military has far more capability to clear mines than ANY entity in Burma/Myanmar. However, even the Thai military has found it difficult to clear the minor amount of landmine pollution Thailand has near some of its border areas. Humanitarian mine clearance is a time consuming and costly activity.

Prior to any clearance, and assessment would have to be made of the location of dangerous or mined areas by a competent entity which can clear mines. There is no entity with this expertise in Burma/Myanmar.

None of the armed groups known to have used mines someplace near the area under question keep or accurately track where they lay mines. Any statement that they can remove them, and do so quickly, is simply bravado.

As far as clearance by some outside entity is concerned, I do not believe any reputable demining agency would do any clearance in the area of concern, since it is expensive and the chance that new mines could be laid is high. An assessment could be made, but such an assessment could be made invalid if any new mines are laid, and the probability of that is high since the conflict in the area remains unresolved.

Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan

Appendix 7: KNLA-DKBA conflict Oct 2009-Jan 2010

Date	Place	Combatant	Wounded	Killed
10/1/09	Kreh Hta	DKBA	2	1
	Kle Poe Khee	DKBA	1	
10/4/09	Htee Ler Thoo Khi	DKBA	1	
10/7/09	Srow Hta	DKBA	1	
10/10/09	Nawta	DKBA	1	
10/12/09	Srow Hta	DKBA	1	
10/14/09	P'nye Pu	DKBA		4
	Htee Hta	DKBA	1	
10/15/09	Mae La Ah Khi	DKBA	1	
	Kreh Poe Klo	DKBA	3	3
10/17/09	Mu Aye Pu	DKBA	1	
10/18/09	Htee Nu	DKBA	1	
10/20/09	Klo Yaw Lay Kho	DKBA	1	1
	T'ler Poe Lay	DKBA	1	
10/21/09	Mae Pauk Hta	DKBA	2	
	Kler Kwee	DKBA	1	
10/26/09	Ku Yaw Klaw	DKBA	1	
10/27/09	Pue Lue Hta	DKBA	1	
10/28/09	Kler Day Car Road	SPDC	1	1
	U Tha Khi	DKBA	1	
	Maw Ko Lay	DKBA	1	
10/29/09	They Bya Pu	DKBA	1	
	P'nye Pu	DKBA	1	1
10/30/09	Htee Tu Kaw	SPDC	8	5
10/31/09	P'nye Pu	DKBA		2
	P'nye Pu	DKBA		3
11/1/09	Kler Kho	DKBA	2	1
11/2/09	Nawta Hta	DKBA	1	
	Nawta Hta	DKBA	1	
11/13/09	T'kaw Kla	DKBA	1	
11/14/09	Mae T'mu Khi	DKBA	1	2
11/27/09	Glo Mae Ni Hta	DKBA		1
12/3/09	Mae Kae Khi	DKBA	1	
12/6/09	Kler Day Kle Mu	SPDC		2
12/7/09	Kler Day Kle Mu	SPDC		
12/13/09	Nawta	DKBA	1	
12/15/09	Kler Day Kle Mu	SPDC	1	
	Mae La Poe Klo	SPDC	1	
1/5/10	Htee Taw Hta	SPDC	6	3
1/7/10	Htee Baw Tho Klo	DKBA	2	
1/19/10	Mae La Poe Hta	DKBA	1	
1/27/10	Mae Tha Mu	DKBA	1	
11/15/09	Ta Thee	DKBA	1	1
10/6/09	Kreh Poe Kwee Lay Day	DKBA		1
12/12/09	Mortar	DKBA		