

UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

Branch Office for Thailand

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NATIONS UNIES
HAUT COMMISSARIAT
POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS

Délégation en Thaïlande

P.O. Box 2-121, Rajdamnern
BANGKOK 10200, Thailand

HCR/BKK/MISC/3163

9 August 1993

Dear Mr. U Ne Oo,

We acknowledge receipt of your letter of 15 July 1993, concerning the general situation of Burmese asylum seekers in Thailand.

With respect to the general situation of the above mentioned asylum seekers, it should be noted that a distinction is made by the Royal Thai Government (RTG) between the approximately 40,000 Burmese who arrived in Thailand prior to 1976, the approximately 70,000 Burmese now living in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, and the Burmese currently in Bangkok. The civilian populations at the border who arrived before 1976 were accorded the status of displaced persons by the RTG in 1976, thus allowing them to reside officially in Thailand although their freedom of movement is restricted to the provinces where they are established. Insofar as the Burmese who arrived after 1976 are concerned, they reside in refugee camps along the border, which are assisted (with the tacit approval of the RTG) by a group of non-governmental organizations referred to as the Burmese Border Consortium (BBC) which functions under the auspices of the CCSDPT. These populations are considered by the Thai authorities as minority groups fleeing generalized violence in their country of origin, whose presence on Thai territory is informally tolerated. UNHCR has visited the aforementioned camps on a regular basis since 1992 to monitor developments therein. The Office does not, however, have a permanent presence in these camps.

Mr. U Ne Oo
Burma Action (SA)
1st Floor, 39 Wakefield St.,
Adelaide, SA 5000
Australia

20 AUG 1993

U Ne Oo,
Burma Action (SA),
1st Floor, 39 Wakefield Street,
Adelaide, SA 5000, AUSTRALIA.

July 15, 1993

Mr. Danial Conway,
P.O. Box 2-121,
Rajdamnern, Bangkok 10200, Thailand.

Dear Mr Conway,

Concerning with the deteriorating situation of Burmese asylum seekers in Thailand, I support the UNHCR to make initiatives for the Royal Thai Government to grant a temporary political asylum status to Burmese refugees. Regrettably, the attention given by UNHCR to Burma's displaced minorities at Thai-Burma border as well as to the Burmese dissidents within Thailand is fall far short of our expectations.

I understand that the Government of Thailand is not a signatory to the international refugee laws for the UNHCR to be fully operational. It must stress, however, that the UNHCR is not an organization which its responsibility is solely to hand-out charity. The UNHCR's responsibility should extends to the protection of abuse on the displaced people anywhere in the world. In this context, the UNHCR in Thailand must become a strong advocate of the safety of the refugees regardless of local laws. The UNHCR must actively seek for a solution to the problems that relates with protection of displaced people.

There had been incidences that the Burmese students have been forcefully repatriated in 1989 (Tak Repatriation Center in Dec 1988- Feb 1989). There were also reports of the Local Thai authorities harassment and abuses on refugees in order to gain advantage on commercial dealings with the Burma Military (Sangklaburi District in April 1991: *Asia Watch, March 20-1992, Vol. No.4, Issue No. 7*). The present conflict of the Thai authorities and Burmese refugee will continue unless the Government of Thailand gives a promise not to make forced repatriation.

I therefore urge the UNHCR in Thailand to speaks out, both in private and public, for the safety of the Burmese refugees. Firstly, the UNHCR must set up an inquiry into these incidences. Secondly, the UNHCR must encourage the Government of Thailand to consider granting a temporary political asylum status to the Burmese refugees. Thirdly, the UNHCR must promote a policy to get access to the Burmese refugee camps along Thai-Burma border.

Yours faithfully,

U Ne Oo
7/15/93
(U Ne Oo)

1. Ms Sadako Ogata, UNHCR, CASE POSTALE 2500, CH-1211 GENEVA-2
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