August 27, 2012

Press release

Shan community groups: Don’t push refugees back into active war zone

Shan community groups are gravely concerned about imminent repatriation of over 500 refugees from a camp on the northern Thai border into an area of active conflict.

Today, the Norwegian Refugee Council, contracted under the Norwegian-led “Myanmar Peace Support Initiative,” will begin house-to-house surveys of refugees in Koung Jor camp, northern Chiang Mai province, about their willingness to return to Mong Hta, about 20 kms across the border. This almost deserted village has been designated as a resettlement site for refugees during ceasefire negotiations between the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and the Burmese government.

Since the SSA-S signed a ceasefire in December 2011, there have been ongoing skirmishes, including in Mong Hta, between Shan troops and the Burma Army, which has not pulled back from conflict areas and has reneged on territorial agreements. Burmese Railway Minister Aung Min had promised the sub-townships of Ho Mong and Mong Hta, bordering Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai provinces, to the SSA-S, but there are still over 40 Burmese military camps in these areas.

The refugees in Koung Jor told Norwegian representatives in July they did not want to go back to Mong Hta due to fear of the Burma Army and other pro-government militias in the area, which is littered with land-mines. Most of the refugees are not from Mong Hta, but from Central Shan State.

The survey starting today in the camp is spreading panic among the refugees, who fear they will shortly be pushed back. The Norwegian Refugee Council has programs inside Burma, but has never before worked with Shan refugees.

“The refugees must not be used as guinea-pigs to test out the peace process,” said Sai Khur Hseng, of the Shan Sapawa Environmental Organisation “Instead of putting pressure on the refugees, international donors should pressure the Burmese government to negotiate a just and lasting peace.”

Shan community groups released a statement in June 2012 calling on foreign governments and donors supporting the peace process in Burma to be neutral and not to push ethnic groups under the Burmese government’s pro-military 2008 constitution.

Contact persons:

Sai Khur Hseng: 0816722031, shancbosforum@gmail.com

Ying Harn Fah, 0892627848

Moan Kaein, 0819921121

Charm Tong: 0816036655
Shan community groups: Shan Human Rights Foundation, Shan Sapawa Environmental Organisation, Shan Women’s Action Network, Shan Youth Power, Shan Youth Network Group

Attachments:

- Map of resettlement site
- Background of Koung Jor Camp
- Joint Statement on current political situation and peace processes by community-based organizations from Shan State, Burma (June 12, 2012)