

Border Situation Update July 23rd 2009

Site Situation

There has been no marked improvement in the security situation around Ler Per Her after it was overrun by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA) last month. Indeed, although there have been no further reports of fighting after the withdrawal of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops, there are ongoing reports of forced recruitment, portering and money/food/livestock extortion by DKBA forces. These abuses continue to result in more people fleeing their villages and crossing to Thailand. While writing this update, TBBC has received notification from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) that another 200 persons have arrived in Tha Song Yang district during the last 24 hours and are now temporarily sheltering at the Mae U Su site.

The situation at Nuh Bo Temple has improved, freeing it up for seasonal festivities after the Thai Authorities agreed to allow the displaced persons to relocate at a new site nearby in Nuh Bo village. Since 5th July, 350 families (2000 persons) from the temple and surrounding villages have now settled at the new site. They were allowed to cut the bamboo in nearby forests, which enabled them to build stronger and more durable shelters.

Khun Tassana Vichaithanapat, Director of Foreign Affairs Division of the Operations Centre for Displaced Persons in Thailand (OCDP), Ministry of Interior (MOI), visited the new site in Nuh Bo on 9th July and gave it his approval. During his visit he met with the former leader of Ler Per Her IDP camp, Thai District Authorities and Military Officials and urged District Authorities and international agencies to continue providing humanitarian support until the Royal Thai Government is able to find a durable solution, or until the displaced people are able to return back to their homes.

Tha Song Yang District Committee, consisting of District Officials, Thai Military, Border Police and UNHCR, met on July 15th to consider all possible solutions to the current situation, such as immediate return to Burma, relocation of the people to Mae La refugee camp, or permitting them to stay where they are for the time being. Finally, it was agreed that the ongoing situation in Burma should be closely monitored but the displaced people should stay where they are, at six displacement sites in Tha Song Yang, until the end of the rainy season, i.e. October/November 2009. At that time the security and humanitarian situation will be reviewed again to determine the next steps.

The most likely outcomes are that if the situation has not improved, the displaced people will be moved to Mae La camp and undergo Provincial Administration Board verification or, if the situation in their places of origin has improved significantly, they will return to Burma. This will depend on DKBA, SPDC and KNLA actions during the next few months.