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Christian Aid/ Kate Tomlinson

A photo gallery is also available on request.

LILY COLE VISITS BURMESE REFUGEES FOR CHRISTIAN AID CHRISTMAS APPEAL

Actress and model Lily Cole is fronting Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal which aims to highlight the plight of millions of refugees worldwide. Over 42 million people are currently displaced, driven from their homes by disaster, war, persecution or hunger.

Lily visited the Nai Soi Camp in Mae Hong Son in Thailand, three miles from the Burmese border. Inhabited by 15,000 people, the camp is one of nine along the Thai-Burmese border housing Burmese refugees. Christian Aid has been working with its partner organisation, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) since 1985, providing food and shelter for the 145,000 refugees living in these camps. It is the refugees themselves that manage the camp.

Few refugees live such hidden lives as the Burmese in Thailand. For over 60 years, the conflict in eastern Burma has displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Since 1984, many have been fleeing to Thailand in order to escape persecution, enforced labour and fighting. These families struggle to survive, dependent upon aid. The Thai authorities are not signatories to the UN Convention on refugees which means the refugees are confined to the camps, with little opportunity for earning a living.

Lily met with several families, and was moved by their stories. Su Meh, who arrived with her family in 1996 after her village was burnt down by the Burmese military, received support from TBBC when they provided her family with the materials to build a home. She is able to earn extra money to help support her husband and three children by weaving bags and traditional clothing.

Lily Cole said: 'Some of the refugees have lived in these camps for 26 years. It's a difficult idea to get my head around. The camps offer a refuge for people who have nowhere else in the world to feel safe and secure. If the funds were removed there would be nowhere for them to go. It's frightening. There wouldn't be this space filled with so many children laughing and playing. TBBC's work - making sure all the refugees are fed and have a shelter over their heads - is vital.'

TBBC's training workshops help people learn new skills. They also develop productive ways for people to earn money inside the camps, such as employing women as weavers which allows them to buy essentials such as soap, clothes and extra food.

Lily met Kay Roh and his wife Rhaimae, who arrived in the camp in 2009. Kay Roh had been wrongly accused of fighting against the Burmese military and spent many months in hiding before fleeing across the border into Thailand. His wife and children joined him a few months later. Rhaimae has now found work in a women's organisation in the camp where she can earn a small amount to supplement their living expenses. Kay Roh, an uneducated farmer, has not found life easy, as he is unable to use his skills to earn a living.

Kay Roh said: 'Life in Burma was my farm and my house. We couldn't take any money from there when we left. Our parents are looking after the land but we can't

communicate with them. If there's opportunity to go outside the camps, I would like to. I would like to find a job to earn money for my family.'

At the end of her trip Lily said: 'It's been one of the most moving trips of my life, and I was very inspired by the work I saw and the people I met. Christian Aid offers these refugees hope and some semblance of normality. They collaborate to make sure these people have food, work, and somewhere to call home. The shelter and food programmes are essentially keeping 145,000 people alive every day, and Christian Aid is one of the organisations enabling that. They are also trying to come up with solutions to try and make these communities more self-sufficient. This is a very worthwhile cause and I'm very proud to be supporting Christian Aid's Christmas appeal."

To donate to Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal visit www.christianaid.org.uk/christmas or call 0845 7000 300

- Ends -

If you would like further information please contact John McKie at jmckie@christian-aid.org or on 0207 523 2417/ 07990 522120 or 24 hour press duty phone – 07850 242950.

A photo gallery of images is available on request from Melanie Marks at mmarks@christian-aid.org or on 020 7523 2421.

Notes to Editors:

1. Christian Aid works in some of the world's poorest communities in nearly 50 countries. We act where the need is greatest, regardless of religion, helping people build the lives they deserve.

2. Lily Cole is an international cover star and regularly works with Vogue, Numero, Dazed and Harpers Bazaar. She has fronted campaigns for Tiffany's, Hermes, Chanel and Rimmel, and is a favourite model of Jean-Paul Gaultier, Louis Vuitton and Karl Lagerfeld. She is a founding partner in ethical clothing line, The North Circular. Lily has a burgeoning acting career and her film credits include Terry Gilliam's *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, Sally Potter's *Rage*, and the upcoming *The Moth Diaries*, directed by Mary Harron. Lily is committed to her charity work and supports Al Gore's Climate Week and other initiatives by the Ethical Justice Foundation. She is in the third year of her History of Art degree at Cambridge University.

3. Christian Aid has a vision, an end to global poverty, and we believe that vision can become a reality.

4. Christian Aid is a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of 100 churches and church-related organisations that work together in humanitarian assistance and development. Further details at <http://www.actalliance.org>

5. Follow Christian Aid's newswire on Twitter: http://twitter.com/caid_newswire

7. For more information about the work of Christian Aid visit www.christianaid.org.uk