



KnRC

Karenni Refugee Committee

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Position on the Repatriation of Refugees from Burma By Karenni Refugee Committee and Karenni Community Based Organizations

After the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) organized three workshops on September 20-21st, November 9th and October 8-10th, attended by representatives of KnRC, Karenni community based organizations and religious leaders, the groups agreed on a common position paper on refugees' repatriation as follow.

Although the situation in Burma has improved and democratic reforms have taken place in the last year and a half, the changes seem to be reversible. There is no political stability due to ongoing conflict in some ethnic areas, no rule of law, no security for refugee returnees, and more importantly, a genuine peace hasn't been established in the country. Thus, it is obvious that this is not the time for the refugees to return yet.

The repatriation of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) must be in line with international principle; the return must be voluntary in "conditions of safety and dignity." Before the refugees return to Burma, the following pre-conditions must be in place:

1. A nationwide ceasefire between the ethnic armed groups and the Burma government must be reached and a genuine and sustainable peace must be established in the country.
2. Rule of law and the human rights situation must have improved significantly.
3. Military bases in the areas where refugees would return must be withdrawn.
4. Landmines in the areas where refugees would return must be cleared.
5. The return of IDPs must take place before the refugees return.
6. The representatives of refugees such as Karenni Refugee Committee and community-based organizations must be part of the repatriation planning, decision making, and implementation process.
7. The repatriation process must be in line with international principles of repatriation ensuring that refugees would return voluntary and in safety and dignity.
8. Those who do not wish to return to their original place can choose to live where they like.

Process to be followed when implementing refugees' repatriation:

1. A land survey group should be formed and it should include local organizations and refugees' representatives.
2. Landmine risk education must be delivered to the refugee returnees in collaboration with local civil society.
3. Efficient social, health, and education services must be set up in relocation areas in collaboration with the relevant parties and with the returnee community. This includes setting up a system to recognize the existing education qualification of the refugees.
4. The relevant parties should provide sustainable vocational skills to the returnees and vocational certificates from the camps must be recognized in Burma.
5. The returnees should receive land on which they can live and work to support themselves. The customary laws of the local community in managing their land must be recognized by the government.
6. There must be a long-term support plan for the refugee returnees' basic needs until they can support themselves.
7. Job opportunities with minimum impact on the forest and environment must be created for the returnee community.
8. There should be a local and international monitoring group. The local monitoring group should include refugee representatives. The media should be freely allowed to document and report the return process.
9. The returnees must be given national identity as soon as possible.
10. There should be a special program to systematically provide assistance to the elderly, disabled persons, women, chronic patients, and children. The special program should continue to provide assistance until the local community and government can take responsibility.
11. Communication and transportation infrastructure should be available in the areas where the refugees return.

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