



Position of Karen Student Network Group on Repatriation

June 20, 2017

INTRODUCTION

On 26-28 December 2016, Karen Student Network Group organised consultation on Refugee Return during its 21st General Annual Meeting held in Mae La Oo refugee camp. This consultation is an important occasion for the Karen Student Network group which stands up for the students and youth in educational development and to get their voice heard in peace-building in Burma. For this consultation, KSNG has invited Progressive Voice(PV), Karen Refugee Committee(KRC), Karen Human Right Group(KHRG), and Karen Women Organisation(KWO) to share Burma's current political situation, refugee situation in Thailand, development and its impacts on land rights, violation of human rights and woman rights.

Based on the outcome of consultation, Karen Student Network Group has come up with its position on refugee return to Burma. There are around 120 representatives participated in this consultation comprises of working group's representatives from six camps, Karen youth leaders, woman representatives and some camp leaders from Maela Oo camp.

ANALYSIS

Currently, there are more than 100,000 refugees, living in nine refugee camps. After peace talk begins in 2012 between the ethnic armed groups and Burmese government, it is obvious to see that, preparedness for refugee repatriation has begun. On the other hand, the country still remains under the military rule as 2008 constitution which is written by the military back constituents, gives absolute power to the army to exercise their power. During the Thein Sein government was in power, the political reform seemed to be progressively promising. However, after the National League for Democracy won the election in 2015, it is experienced that, more fightings occur between the southern ethnic armed groups which signals that, the government is losing the grip over the army. In 2016, the fighting occurred between the splinter group of DKBA and the combined forces of Burmese army and Border Guide Force, which displaced more than 4,000 people in Karen State.

Thein Sein's government seems to open up way for return to refugees, however, there is no concrete plan being implemented. In the same way, NLD government has no plan for refugee repatriation and no dialogue has taken place over the issue of refugees. Political instability and unreadiness from the Burmese government have led us to conclude that, it is not a conducive time for refugees to return. Based upon the above analysis, the Karen Student Network Group has proposed two positions based on the processes of return; firstly, pre-departure of refugee and after departure of refugee to Burma.

1. KSNG's Position on Pre-departure of Refugee

1.1. Karen Refugee Education should be recognized by the government and refugee students should have the right to continue their higher education.

1.2. Refugee Students should have the right to continue their further studies outside the camps to Thai universities, in Asia and all over the world.

1.3. Refugee Education should have the right to prescribe their own curricula and learn their own history, culture and language.

1.4. Karen students and youth should have their right to freedom of forming organisation, freedom of expression and freedom to act independantly for community development.

1.5. Karen students and youth should have the freedom to travel without restriction n order to build relationship with students learning outside the refugee camps.

1.6. Karen Students and youth should have the right to participate in political reform processes and should be empowered to involve in peace building processes.

1.7. Organisations providing services in refugee camps, should have the plan to support the refugees till they can return home.

1.8. Organisations providing services in refugee camps, should support Karen students and youth to lead the community in democratic way with ethnic's equality and help to prepare them in building federal democracy in Burma.

2. KSNG's Postion on Post-departure and Reintegration of Refugee

2.1. Refugees should return only after war stops in the whole country and all the ethnic armed groups have signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agree (NCA).

2.2. All the Burmese military camps should be relocated distance from the villages and localities and landmines have been cleared.

2.3. Adequate land should be provided the government for IDPs and refugees who have lost their land with full gurantee for livelihood activities.

2.4. Return should take place only after political dialogue is sucessful in forming federal democracy.

2.5. When the policies of Karen Education Department are recognised and supported by the government.

2.6. Karen national flag should be allowed to raise in front of the Karen national schools without any hindrance.

2.7. Karen students should have the right to learn Karen curricula which includes Karen history, culture and tradition and Karen language produced by Karen Education Department.

2.8. After returning, Karen students and youth should be provided with national identification card as a citizen with equality and without any discrimination.

2.9. Humanitarian assistance from supporting organsitions should be provided till the returning refugees can be self-reliant.

2.10. Karen youth should be provided with job opportunity for their livelihood and free from any form of slavery.

2.11. Karen students and youth organisation should have right to freedom of formation of organisation, expressing opinion and freedom to act independantly in community development.

2.12. Karen students and youth should have the right to build network with other ethnic groups in Burma and all over the world.