

UNHCR

THAILAND-MYANMAR CROSS-BORDER BULLETIN

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PUSHING THE ELEPHANT

“Forgiving and forgetting sounds easy, but in practice this is very difficult” said one refugee attending the recent screening in Mae Ra Ma Luang camp of the film ‘Pushing the Elephant’ which tells the story of a Congolese woman, Rose, a former refugee who has found the strength to move on with her life after the horrors of war that she, and her family, have experienced.

Refugee families just like families everywhere are always busy with the day-to-day activities of life such as cooking, getting the children to school, gardening and other domestic chores; so the film was a welcome opportunity for them to reflect on how another refugee, named Rose, was able to work towards bringing peace and reconciliation to her home community in Eastern Congo.

The film screenings were held as refugees are increasingly turning their minds towards the future and life after camps.

The refugees who watched the film were very interested in the bravery of Rose and the film stimulated reflection on how peace can be made a reality not only between the different armed groups but between the different people of Myanmar.



Film Screening “Pushing the Elephant”

UNHCR and partners respond to flooding in southeast Myanmar



A UNHCR relief team travels by boat to a village in Mon State that has been cut off by flooding in August 2013

An estimated 40,000 were displaced in southeast Myanmar when heavy seasonal rainfall battered the region in July and August 2013, triggering widespread flooding which damaged houses and destroyed crops. Kayin State was the worst affected, with approximately 33,000 people displaced, hosted in temporary sites such as schools and monasteries, while smaller numbers were impacted in Mon State and Tanintharyi Region.

The emergency response was led by the Kayin State government to request UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations to mobilise and support the relief efforts. Starting 7 August 2013, UNHCR worked with local authorities and the Myanmar Red Cross Society to distribute non-food item (NFI) kits containing sleeping mats, mosquito nets and kitchen sets, among other essential relief materials. In total, more than 16,400 people benefited from the UNHCR and MRCS relief efforts, many of them in areas previously affected by conflict between the government and non-state armed actors.

A month after the floods in Kayin State subsided, Tanintharyi Region was again overwhelmed by late September flooding, causing the water level to rise to 22ft in some places. The September floods displaced approximately 2,000 individuals, who were again provided temporary shelter in local facilities such as schools and monasteries, until the water level receded a week later.

One elderly woman in Kyaikdon township remarked that, "this is the first time I've received assistance", adding that "the quality is very good too." The flood response with MRCS and government actors was a positive step forward for humanitarian coordination in the region. UNHCR hopes the 2013 experience will provide a blueprint for collaborative response in the future.



A UNHCR staff member explains how to use a jerry can during the flood response in Kayin State in August 2013

Celebrating the Day of Peace

What are your “Dreams for Peace”? Children and youth speak out in prose, verse and art following the UNHCR-organised competition running up to the International Day for Peace 2013 in the Tak camps and migrant schools.

It was certainly difficult to decide the winners with so many inspired submissions from the talented young people. The following sample are some of the best entries :

“ The black colour outside represents countries around the world that face difficulties and have no peace. The blue colour moving from the black area to the white area represents the countries that move towards peace and the white colour represents the countries that already have peace, smaller than the black colour area. The pole over the world represents peace and the four foundations for peace that are unity, understanding, love, and forgiveness.”

PYAE LIN TUN, 15 YEARS, GRADE 8,
BHSOH (MIGRANT SCHOOL)



“...poor and rich everyone needs peace. You do not think that the rich do not want peace as the poor do? Not like that. Even though the rich is full with food and clothes, their minds need peace as well...”

EXCERPT FROM ESSAY “DREAM AND HOPE
FOR PEACE” -
NAY BLU MOO, 17 YEARS OLD

“ In a beautiful world
No harbouring of anger
Working against one’s weakness
With love
No discrimination
Must build a peaceful world
It is desirable
To become a peaceful world
Every nationality and ethnicity must
try hard ”

BEAUTIFUL WORLD

BY ESTER KYAW, UMPIUM CAMP, 13



"Future means development"



Due to the protracted situation of refugees in camp, the memory of "home" for most of the refugees is linked directly with the conflict, with suffering, and other negative memories. It makes it difficult for youth, children and the community in general to think about their future "back home". During the peace day celebration, focus group discussions also took place with older persons who also shared the wisdom that their own life experiences had taught them.

It is for this particular reason that we consider that as an initial approach towards a reconciliation with the past, it is important to bring back all those good memories of "home" and start to work towards the positive view and hopes for the future.

"In the future, if I could have an opportunity to study more"



The "Voices of the Youth" is a video clip as part of 2013 International Peace Day activities in the two Karenni Camps, i.e., Ban Mai Noi Soi and Ban Mae Surin Camps, in Mae Hong Son Province.

Showcasing the voices of the youth (girls and boys), includes children with disabilities and others with specific needs, focusing on how they view their future and a possible role that they could play in the peace and reconciliation process keeping in view the developments that are taking place in Myanmar.

Some of the most powerful messages that came out are:

"In the future I would like to become a person who can benefit my country and nation"

"I think the future is good for me. In the future, if I could have an opportunity to study more I would like to work for reconciliation"

Peace is "Happiness, peaceful life and no difficulty"

"Peace is in the hands of you, me and all of us"

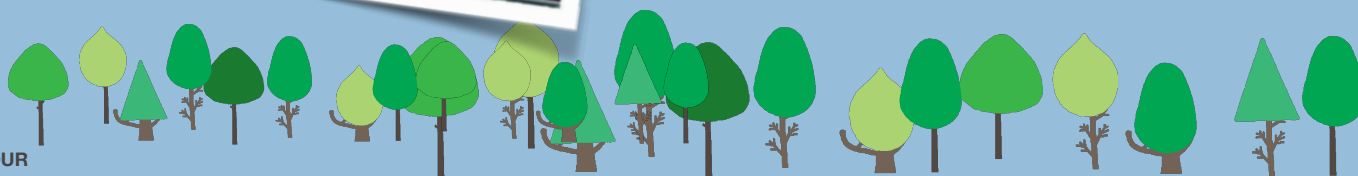
"I think there is the need to work together to achieve peace"



Voices of the Youth

See the video:

<http://data.unhcr.org/thailand/storyline.php>





MRCS Life Skills training makes an impact in rural communities

From 24 to 26 September 2013, the Myanmar Red Cross Society conducted a Life Skills Training workshop in Pan Dan Ngun Lay Village, Thanphyuzayat Township, Mon State. Divided into three sessions, health education, first aid training and hygiene promotion, the workshop was the latest in a series of trainings designed to promote community empowerment and self-reliance in areas of potential return for refugees and IDPs in southeast of Myanmar.

The Life Skills Training project is part of a broader UNHCR effort to strengthen the capacity of communi-

ty-based organisations (CBOs). For these workshops, MRCS has been engaged as an implementing partner to utilize their long-standing presence with these communities. The training in Pan Dan Ngun Lay Village was one of 42 planned interventions for the CBO Strengthening program across Mon State, Kayin State, and Tanintharyi Region.



The Myanmar Red Cross Society performs a puppet show as part of a Life Skills Training session in Mon State, Myanmar

"A year ago there was a motorbike accident in the village where a woman died of her injuries and a man was seriously injured," explained the MRCS facilitator. "According to the community leaders, the woman could have been saved if somebody in the village would have known how to give first aid."

"[A] challenge is to get people to attend the training because before the training, especially in rural areas," explains the MRCS facilitator, "the participants have almost no existing knowledge about hygiene or first aid."



A facilitator from the Myanmar Red Cross Society leads a Life Skills Training session in Mon State, Myanmar

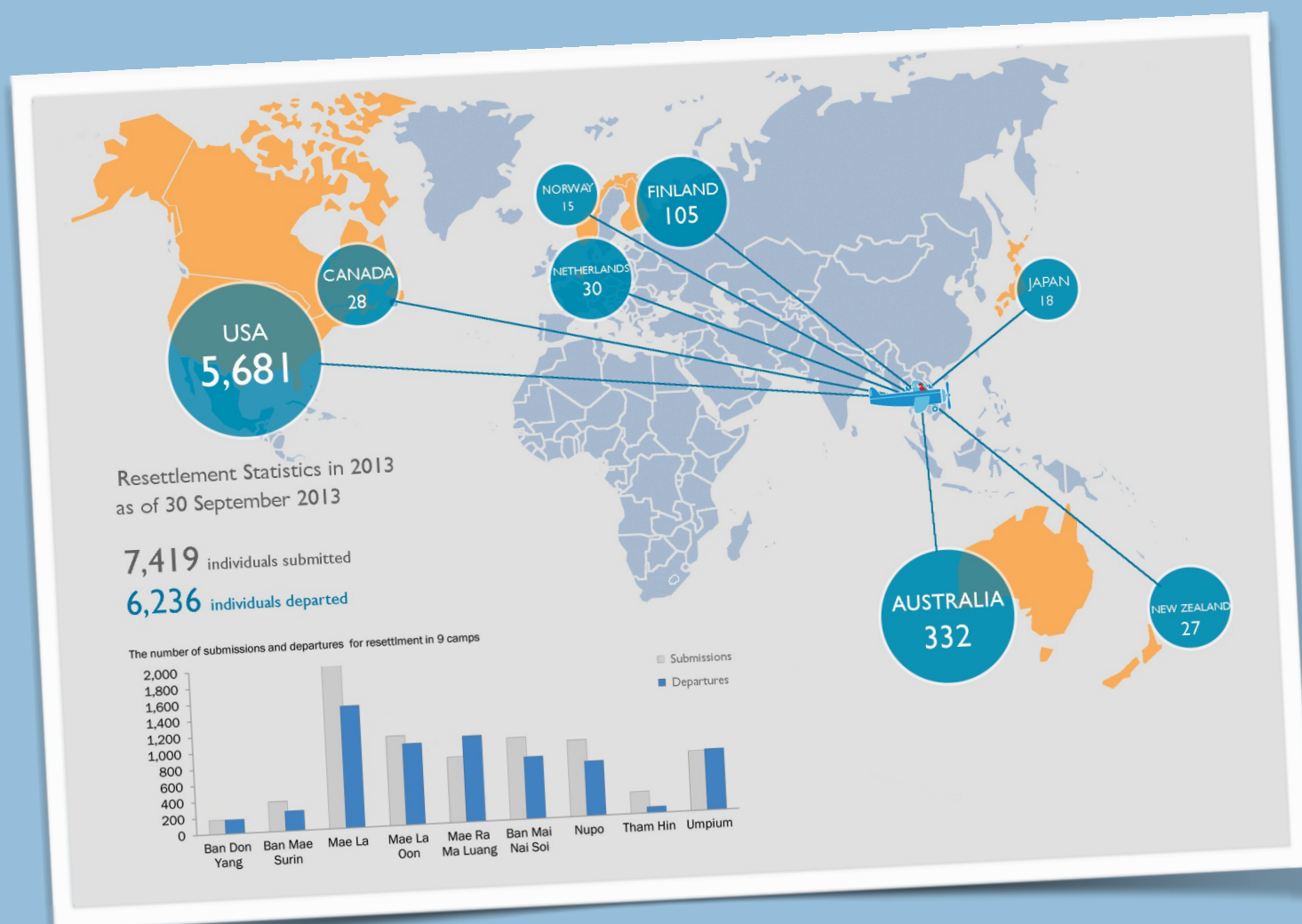
Resettlement during 2013

Since 2005, a time when return to Myanmar was only a remote possibility, almost 88,000 refugees have resettled to third countries and have started new lives.

Developments towards peace and reconciliation in Myanmar, particularly since 2010, have led refugees to consider a possible return home.

However, importantly, resettlement will continue to be available to a number of refugees in the future even as voluntary returns start to materialise.

The first nine months of 2013 has seen more than 6,200 refugees depart Thailand to start a new life and begin their future in another country.



* Resettlement figures as it concerns the nine Temporary Shelters only

Launch of the Mediation and Dispute Resolution Guidelines (MDRG) Mae La Camp, Tak Province

Wednesday 9 October 2013 was a long awaited day as the Mediation and Dispute Resolution Guidelines (MDRG) were launched in Mae La camp.

The 12 sets of Guidelines complement the rules and regulations of the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) and are the product of discussions, debates and hard work by the refugee community, and supported by the 'Access to Justice' programme implemented by the IRC in partnership with UNHCR and several donors.

Despite the time taken to finalise the Guidelines, the community can take pride in what is now a means of finding solutions to manageable small-scale disputes through peaceful and reconciliatory means. While acknowledging the role and jurisdiction of Thai law, Tee George (Uncle George), Vice Chairperson of the

KRC, felt that the MDRG complement traditional community values while ensuring that action taken following disputes respects international standards.

The colourful event was graced by various performances which included a lively and informative sketch on how the community can benefit from the MDRG. The finale was the official opening of the Mediation and Arbitration Centre (previously Camp Justice Office) by the Camp Commander, Tee George, Saw Honest, Mae La Camp Leader, Mr. James Lenton, IRC Deputy Director of Programs, and Ms. May Fong Choong, UNHCR Senior Protection Officer.



Officiating the Mediation and Arbitration Centre, from left to right; Mr. James Lenton IRC Deputy Director of Programs, Mr. Preeda Foongtrakulchai, Mae La Camp Commander and Ms. May Fong Choong, UNHCR Senior Protection Officer



Stalks converted into seats



Traditional Karen opening performance

The Camp Committees in the seven Karen Temporary Shelters, for which Mae La is the pilot, will now look into how the MDRG can be gradually rolled out. As IRC LAC and UNHCR continue to support communities on accessing Thai justice, the MDRG provides an avenue for communities to resolve smaller scale conflicts on their own terms in accordance with principles of fairness, transparency and good governance.

Coordination in southeast Myanmar



September saw a new level of coordination among partners. The UNHCR southeast Consultations in September in Yangon brought together peace-building, development and humanitarian actors. UNHCR briefed partners on the results of the refugee profiling from Mae La Temporary Shelter in Thailand and on the progress of return assessments being undertaken in Kayah, Mon and Tanintharyi. Collectively, the reports on all these initiatives represent an enormous step forward in sharing information on the southeast.

The SE Consultations were directly preceded by an operations meeting looking at Kayin State. The meeting looked at the current situation in Kayin, noting the difficulties in access to much of the State, the uncertain political background and the uneven nature of as-

sistance both by sector and geography, and asked for much greater effort to be put into coordination there.

In the same month of September, UNDP, OCHA, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and UNHCR met in Yangon to discuss coordination in the southeast. The discussion touched upon the nature of the situation in the southeast on the continuum from relief to recovery to development and what kind of assistance, including in coordination, the UN should be providing there. UNHCR presented the results of a coordination gaps analysis, access and assistance overviews and outlined the results of the refugee profiling.

Cross-Border Web Portal

As part of the Information Management Common Service, UNHCR launched the cross-border web portal which aims to deliver timely information to refugees to assist with their decision-making process concerning durable solutions, including the possibility of voluntary return.

Please visit the portal at : www.commonservice.info



Information Management Unit Thailand Operation

UNHCR Field Office Mae Sot
34/5 Mae Sot-Mae Tao Rd.,
Mae Sot District, Tak
63110 THAILAND

Contact: illangas@unhcr.org
suksathi@unhcr.org

UNHCR Thailand

3rd Fl., United Nations Building
Rajadamnern Nok Ave.,
Bangkok 10200 THAILAND

UNHCR Myanmar

287 Pyay Rd., Myaynigone,
Sanchaung Township, Yangon,
MYANMAR PO BOX 1485

Contact: rehmark@unhcr.org