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UPDATED POPULATION FIGURES FOR REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND SHOW 7.1% DECREASE

Population Data details new refugee arrivals, resettlement, small proportion of refugees returning to Myanmar

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Bangkok, Thailand – Updated 2013 population figures for the refugee camps on the Thailand-Myanmar border show that the net population decreased 9,044 or 7.1% in 2013. The total population living in the nine camps was 119,156 at the end of December 2013, compared to 128,200 at the end of 2012, according to The Border Consortium (TBC), an NGO that works with refugees and displaced people from Myanmar.

The largest proportion of departures from the camps - 7,649* - consists of refugees leaving for third countries under the UNHCR's resettlement programme.

"It is important to note that while there was a net population decrease, new refugees are continuing to arrive in the camps; there were 3,300 new asylum seekers arriving in 2013," said Sally Thompson, Executive Director of The Border Consortium. "In addition, 3,137 children were born in camps in 2013," Thompson added.

"Changes in population do not mean that there is any less need for protection, food, shelter, and essential services such as education and health care in the camps," noted Thompson. "There are still 120,000 people living in extremely vulnerable conditions in refugee camps on Thai-Myanmar border, and they continue to need protection and humanitarian assistance."

TBC also notes that there is no indication a large proportion of refugees are returning to Myanmar. Only 3.4 per cent of the December 2012 camp population returned to Myanmar, versus 6 per cent who were resettled to third countries.

"These figures show us that refugees are not leaving the camps and returning to Myanmar en masse," said TBC's Thompson. "It appears that the majority of those returning are going back on a 'look and see' basis."

TBC's data shows that of the 4,389 people who did leave the camps to return to Myanmar, fully 70% of all departures include just 1 or 2 people from a household, while the rest of the household remains in the camps.

TBC agrees with UNHCR, the Government of the Union of Myanmar, the Royal Thai Government, and many international partners that conditions do not yet exist for the organised return of refugees.

An additional 3,348 refugees left the camps in 2013 to seek work in the migrant community.

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For more information or interview requests:

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* The final number of refugees that left camps under the UNHCR's resettlement programme will likely be larger than 7,649, pending receipt of year-end data from the International Organization for Migration.

Methodology: TBC's Total Population Database is (TPD) is an electronic database containing all relevant population data, is collected through an annual Population Verification Census, involving a face-to-face interview with all registered and unregistered refugees of all ages in all camps. At interview, registered refugees have their UNHCR registration papers checked and entered into the TPD. All unregistered refugees have their data recorded and have a photo taken which is also included in the TPD. The TPD is then updated monthly for population increases (new arrivals, births) and permanent departures (resettlement and deaths).

Background Information

- As of December 31 2013, there were 119,156 refugees in nine refugee camps on the Thai/Myanmar border.
 - The 2013 total population increase was 8,861 persons, accounting for new refugees, births, and other.
 - The total 2013 population decrease was 17,905 persons, including third country resettlement, return to Myanmar, deaths, and leaving to seek work in the migrant community
 - Therefore, the net population decrease for 2013 was 9,044, or 7.1%
- The Border Consortium provides food, shelter and capacity building to refugees from Burma/Myanmar, internally displaced persons, and conflict-affected people through community managed programmes.
- UNHCR, TBC, The Union Government of the Republic of Myanmar, the Royal Thai Government, and TBC's international partners all agree that conditions do not yet exist for the organised return of refugees.
- TBC subscribes to the UNHCR's principles regarding voluntary return, that organised return is based on a free and informed decision and in conditions of safety and dignity.
- TBC is a consortium of ten International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) from eight countries. TBC's head office is in Bangkok, with field offices in the border towns of Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang, Mae Sot, Umphang, Kanchanaburi and a Programme Office in Yangon.