

THAILAND

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Ensure that the fundamentals of international protection, particularly the principles of asylum and *non-refoulement*, are respected and effectively implemented.
- Ensure that refugee populations in the Thai-Myanmar border area are safe from armed incursions, that their protection and humanitarian needs are adequately met, and that the civilian character of refugee camps is maintained.
- Promptly identify and protect individual asylum-seekers and promote the development of national refugee legislation and status determination procedures consistent with international standards.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

The siege of the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok in late 1999 and that of Ratchaburi Hospital in early 2000 by Myanmar insurgents had a negative impact on the general public's attitude towards Myanmar refugees and migrants. This negative climate, exacerbated by the local media, gave more political weight to those in the Thai Government who advocate tighter restrictions on refugees. UNHCR's interventions with border authorities and local admission boards have permitted the admission of several hundred new arrivals at the border or in the camps.

The Bangkok and Ratchaburi incidents also led the Thai Government to request the resettlement to third countries of the refugees residing at the Maneeloy Burmese Student Centre in Ratchaburi and the subsequent closure of the Centre. At the end of June, 1,767 refugees were living in the Student Centre. UNHCR continued to provide them with daily assistance and to seek resettlement options for all those who are eligible and willing. As at 30

June, 1,415 persons had been submitted to embassies for resettlement consideration. A total of 338 persons had departed from the Centre for resettlement in third countries during the first six months of the year.

In April 2000, the Thai Government agreed to harmonise its policy with regard to all Myanmar refugees in Thailand. This had long been advocated by UNHCR due to the differences in treatment between refugees at the border and in urban areas, and between ethnic Burmese refugees and those belonging to other ethnic minorities. Under the terms of this agreement, all Myanmar asylum-seekers will be considered by Admission Boards at the border and will be provided refuge in the camps, if determined to meet the admission criteria.

Consequently, UNHCR's present practice of conducting refugee status determination for Myanmar asylum-seekers in Bangkok will be discontinued. Myanmar asylum-seekers in urban centres will be granted safe passage to the border by the Thai Government and placed in reception centres, which will be monitored by UNHCR and provided with assistance from NGOs, until their status is determined. There was a delay in the implementation of this policy and the related modalities were clarified in mid-July. A first movement of 85 persons from the Bangkok area, initially scheduled to take place in August, has been temporarily postponed.

At the end of June, some 100,306 Karen and Karenni refugees were accommodated in 11 camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. In the first year since the registration of the camp populations was initiated in May 1999, jointly conducted by UNHCR and the Thai Ministry of Interior, there were approximately 17,749 new arrivals into the border area, with another 669 persons arriving during the month of June. Although some opted to return voluntarily to Myanmar, the majority is now in various stages of the admission process. UNHCR advo-

cated the establishment of uniform criteria by the Thai Government as well as harmonised and transparent admission procedures at the border, including a more clearly defined role for UNHCR.

The registration of all camp populations continued to be updated and maintained through the joint efforts of UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior. This registration has enabled UNHCR to intervene on behalf of refugees more effectively and helped to differentiate between refugees and illegal immigrants who enter Thailand for economic reasons. UNHCR also continued to monitor the civilian character of the camps and sought a more permanent presence at the sites in order to have a closer contact with the camp population. Limited assistance was provided in the camps in the form of alternative cooking fuel and other environmental-preservation and site-planning measures, repair of roads leading to camps and special assistance to vulnerable individuals. QIPs assisted local villages affected by the presence of refugee camps. Environmental prevention measures were taken to avoid upstream river pollution. Local schools in Ratchaburi also received support from UNHCR. At the Manee-loy Burmese Student Centre, UNHCR supported HIV-prevention programmes as well as tailored assistance to HIV patients, including medical follow-up and individual psycho-social counselling. A mental health programme was established with a particular focus on domestic violence and drug addiction. Vocational training programmes were prepared in consultation with refugee women.

UNHCR also continued to pursue the longer-term objective of voluntary repatriation by monitoring developments in the country of origin and assessing refugee attitudes towards repatriation. However, several fundamental conditions still have to be met before UNHCR is able to mount a repatriation operation. These conditions include: the removal of the cause of flight, safe and voluntary nature of repatriation and unrestricted access of UNHCR to both sides of the border, so that UNHCR can monitor the movements, the well-being of the re-

turnees and facilitate the provision of reintegration assistance.

In order to disseminate refugee law principles and promote best practices towards refugee protection, UNHCR conducted various capacity-building and training initiatives for Thai officials as well as other constituencies. During the first six months of the year, over 500 persons benefited from UNHCR protection training workshops, including border patrol police, the military, journalists and students. UNHCR also proactively engaged the NGO community in protection-related training activities, emphasising the specific needs of refugee women and children, especially vulnerable groups among them, such as female-headed households or separated children.

In the absence of national refugee legislation and refugee status determination procedures, UNHCR continued to carry out the status determination of individual asylum-seekers of various nationalities arriving in Thailand. UNHCR provided subsistence to needy refugees, and sought long-term solutions for them, in the form of resettlement to a third country or voluntary repatriation, as appropriate.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

The initial objectives and priorities for this operation remain unchanged, despite the deterioration of the general working environment. UNHCR will continue to make every effort to clarify the working arrangements agreed upon with the Thai Government in June 1998 when UNHCR was officially invited to have an expanded protection role at the Thai-Myanmar border.

Other priority areas for UNHCR include:

- The uniform application of criteria for the admission of persons (to include not only those fleeing fighting, but also those fleeing the consequences thereof);

- The implementation of clearly defined admission procedures (with UNHCR serving in an observer capacity); and
- The effective implementation of the Thai Government's harmonisation policy thereby ensuring fair and equal treatment of all Myanmar asylum-seekers and refugees

in Thailand.
 UNHCR will continue to mobilise Government officials, academic institutions and the public at large, through intensive capacity-building, training and public awareness activities, to promote the establishment of a legal framework and a favourable environment for the protection of refugees in Thailand.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	5'987'452	5'963'156	2'681'485	2'439'400

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region, opening balance and adjustments.

