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## Burmese refugees on the way to US

**The first group of Burmese refugees offered resettlement in the US has left a border camp in Thailand.**

Sixty-three people left Tham Hin camp on Tuesday, but hundreds more are due to go in the coming weeks, according to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR.

The refugees are mainly from the minority Karen ethnic group.

UNHCR chief Antonio Guterres and US Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey visited the camp on Tuesday to highlight the refugees' plight.

Thousands of people have fled across the border to temporary camps in Thailand to escape fighting between ethnic rebel groups and the Burmese military.

More than 140,000 Burmese nationals, mostly from Karen or other minority groups, live in these camps.

Most of those living in Tham Hin have been there for nearly 10 years.

### Asylum

Last year, Washington offered all the residents of Tham Him the chance to resettle in the US.

But stringent new anti-terrorism rules imposed by the Homeland Security Act barred many of them, on the grounds that at some time in the past they had made contact with the armed Karen rebel army, the Karen National Union (KNU).

Ms Sauerbrey admitted during her visit on Tuesday that this law had "caught people who were not intended to be caught".

The US has recently waived this restriction, and Ms Sauerbrey said Washington was "very keen to resettle as many of these refugees as want to come".

She added: "Within the next year, we hope to bring thousands from Tham Hin and also to begin processing refugees from the other six camps where there are Karen."

Some 2,700 refugees are expected to have left the camp for the US by the end of this year.

As well as participating in US resettlement programmes, the UNHCR is working with countries including Australia, Canada and the UK to secure places for the refugees.

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