

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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MEDIA NOTE

The Department of State Decides Material Support Inapplicable to Second Group of Karen Refugees in Thailand

The Department of State has exercised discretionary authority under the *Immigration and Nationality Act*, so that refugees in camps in Thailand who are provided access to the US Refugee Admissions Program and who meet all other eligibility requirements for resettlement under the Administration's Refugee Admissions Program, including that they pose no danger to the safety and security of the United States, can resettle in the United States even if they have "provided material support" to the Karen National Union (KNU). This determination will allow the Department of Homeland Security to approve otherwise eligible Karen refugees for admission to the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security is the agency responsible for adjudicating refugee applications for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

There are well over 100,000 ethnic Karen refugees from Burma in camps in Thailand, many of whom fled military attacks on their villages over the last decade. These refugees have been identified as a population of special humanitarian concern to the United States due to the persecution they have experienced and because for many resettlement will be the preferred durable solution. Because of their links to the KNU, a significant portion of these refugees is expected to be affected by the "material support" issue. The KNU, founded in 1948, historically has functioned as the de facto civilian government of the Karen people in the areas it controlled, resisting the repression of and seeking autonomy from the Burmese regime. The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is the armed wing of the KNU. In early 2004, Burma's military regime and the KNU entered into a temporary ceasefire, but the talks have since stalled, failing to formalize an end to the conflict.

The Department exercised this authority earlier this year with respect to refugees from the Tham Hin camp in Thailand. Of the more than 9500 refugees in Tham Hin, approximately one-third of the population came forward for resettlement consideration by the United States. Of that number, 2700 were approved. A handful of these Karen refugees have already arrived in the U.S. The Department of State expects that about half of the 2700 will arrive by October 1 of this year, and the balance early in FY 2007. It is our policy not to comment publicly on where refugees will be resettled, in order to protect and respect the privacy of the applicants and their families and the integrity and confidentiality of the asylum process.

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