



Thailand: Protect people fleeing violence in Myanmar

24 December 2021

We, the undersigned organisations, call on the Royal Thai Government to protect and assist thousands of people fleeing violence in Myanmar. The conflict and humanitarian situation in Myanmar continue to deteriorate, making the need for safe border crossings into Thailand and access to humanitarian assistance and asylum all the more urgent.

Since 15 December, an escalation in armed conflict in Kayah State in Myanmar has forcibly displaced an estimated 10,000 people from Lay Kay Kaw and nearby villages, including 3,900 people who have crossed the border into Thailand. It has resulted in an unknown number of civilian casualties, damage to infrastructure and multiple displacements. The displaced people are currently being hosted in a variety of temporary, makeshift sites that do not provide adequate shelter and protection including in schools, places of worship and in open fields and forested areas.

On 22 December 2021, reports emerged that 1,000 villagers, including children who were fleeing conflict in the border areas, were prevented by Thai authorities from crossing the river from Myanmar into Thailand. They are in immediate need of food, water and other essential aid. Aid agencies are facing difficulties in accessing people in need and providing services in displacement sites in Thailand. They also face persistent challenges with delivering aid supplies to Myawaddy, across the border in Myanmar due to road blockages and security restrictions.

We urge the Royal Thai Government to keep Thailand's borders open to people fleeing violence in Myanmar and to uphold its obligations under international law and stated commitment to protecting and assisting refugees. It should stop pushing back people seeking refuge in Thailand or attempting to cross the border as their lives are in danger. Fighting, shelling and airstrikes continue in Kayah state, including in the areas where people have fled. Any returns must be truly voluntary, based on informed consent and carried out in safety and dignity.

We also urge the Royal Thai Government not to push people back to Myanmar because of Covid-19. While any movement of people must be properly managed with rigorous public health measures in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, trying to contain the pandemic is not a justification for pushing people back to unsafe and dangerous situations.

We are calling on the Thai Government to take the following actions to protect and assist those fleeing Myanmar:

- ***Keep Thailand's borders open to people fleeing violence in Myanmar.*** Respect the principle of non-refoulement; do not push back people seeking protection in Thailand. Consider all people attempting to cross the Myanmar Thailand border as potential refugees.
- ***Implement the five-point consensus agreed at the ASEAN Special Leaders Meeting on Myanmar on 24 April 2021,*** particularly the priority to ensure delivery of humanitarian relief to the people of Myanmar.
- ***Establish clear and systematic screening procedures along the border area,*** in coordination with the UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to allow people fleeing to seek asylum. Allow people access to the national screening mechanism and give them the opportunity to apply for the status of being protected persons. Ensure adequate COVID-19 screening, quarantine and treatment facilities are available for those crossing the border.
- ***Allow UNHCR and humanitarian organisations to independently screen arrivals from Myanmar to identify and support the most vulnerable groups*** including separated and unaccompanied children, pregnant women, elderly and people with disabilities. Ensure that psychosocial and physical harm screening as well as protection monitoring is in place for new arrivals.
- ***Allow humanitarian agencies access to displacement holding sites, enable them to conduct needs assessments and provide lifesaving aid and other services*** especially for the most vulnerable groups, including food, water and health care.
- ***Ensure that displacement holding sites are adapted for the potential longer-term stay of people fleeing Myanmar, including the provision*** of inclusive and physically safe spaces for children and child-centred services such as health and nutrition, education, child protection and psychosocial support.
- ***The Royal Thai Government should work with ASEAN and its member states to find political and diplomatic solutions*** to address the root causes of the conflict in Myanmar.

Signatories

Adventist Development and Relief Agency
 Asylum Access Thailand
 Coalition for the Rights of Refugees and Stateless Persons
 COEER Foundation
 Handicap International
 International Rescue Committee
 Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand
 Right to Play
 Ruammit Foundation-DARE Network
 Save the Children
 Pestalozzi Children's Foundation
 Stateless Children Projection Project III
 Terre des Hommes Germany
 The Border Consortium
 WEAVE Foundation