



## **South-East Myanmar Consultations Meeting**

**16 May 2013  
Myanmar Peace Centre**

### **DRAFT Minutes**

Chair: Hans ten Feld, Representative, UNHCR Myanmar

#### **1. Welcome and Updates from UNHCR Myanmar (Chair: Hans ten Feld, UNHCR)**

- Participants were introduced to Ms Mireille Girard, Representative, UNHCR Thailand.
- Noted that the last consultation meeting was in February. In the future, UNHCR will aim to convene meetings every two months.

#### **2. Updates from Myanmar Peace Centre**

- The first phase of the Joint Peacebuilding Needs Assessment (JPNA) - a desk review taking stock of existing needs assessments and available data - has now been completed, and the report should be made available shortly. Thanks were extended to UN agencies, the World Bank and NGOs for sharing information. It was noted that there were a number of NGOs and agencies conducting assessments in the region and it is important to ensure that there is follow up and that unnecessary duplication is avoided. Thus, there was a need to have a consolidated document that reflects what has already been undertaken.
- The JPNA should also assist long-term planning; noting that the situation is contingent on political talks, there is still a need to make preparations. The JPNA should be a framework document, and there will be room for individual agencies to make contributions and participate.
- On behalf of the Government, a request was made for NGOs and other actors to give continued support to beneficiaries, particularly as the rainy season is upon us and there may be immediate needs for emergency response such as shelter and food security.

#### **3. Updates from UNHCR Thailand**

- There were two key messages from UNHCR Thailand: firstly, refugees were thinking more about solutions and have been observing developments in Myanmar; secondly, there was an increasing movement in and out of camps.

- On the first point, refugees in Thailand were cautiously optimistic about developments in Myanmar but need to know more information about what is happening, thus it is important to share information. Voluntary repatriation has been discussed. Refugees were asking UNHCR what safeguards and guarantees would be in place in the event of return.
- In the past month in April, UNHCR Thailand has been conducting a survey to glean more of the situation. UNHCR compared survey notes with Thai-Burma Consortium (TBC) figures from last year and this year. UNHCR's survey found that there were a number of people moving out of camps looking for jobs and/or livelihood opportunities in the Thai community (of those surveyed, 30% of the registered caseload 'missing' from the camps fell into this category. In terms of return movement to Myanmar, the number was fewer – only 19%. This is an indication that people are increasingly contemplating a future beyond the camps.
- The survey indicated that some people were indeed returning to Myanmar; however, the majority of those returning were doing so only temporarily, for example to look at livelihoods opportunities, to visit family members, before going back to Thailand. Only a few were reported to have returned permanently. This coincides with the findings of TBC, and observations by UNHCR colleagues inside Myanmar.
- Next week UNHCR will be launching a systematic survey/profiling of the camp population, including both the registered and unregistered population. Questions asked will look at refugees' perspectives regarding possible return, resettlement to a third country or options in Thailand.
- It was noted that this survey would take a snapshot of refugees' opinions at the time and that they may change their minds; however, it should help us to anticipate potential areas of concentration of return and to better analyse possible livelihoods options. This should help planning on both sides. The survey will begin in Mae La camp in the coming weeks and some initial results should be available in July/August. The population to be surveyed in Mae La is approximately 45,000 (out of a total population of 128,000 currently residing in the nine 'temporary shelters'). UNHCR will share results as they become available. The survey will subsequently be rolled out in other camps.
- Regarding resettlement, it was reported that 83,000 refugees had been resettled since 2005 (representing almost two thirds of the current camp population). The population remains at its current level because new arrivals have continued throughout the resettlement programme.
- Regarding the potential for a future voluntary repatriation, preparations are necessary to ensure that safeguards are put in place. These should include appropriate amnesties, freedom of choice of residence upon return, humanitarian

access, and recognition of birth certificates and other documentation such as education certification from the Thai side. These provisions should normally be reflected in a tripartite agreement which would provide the framework for an organised voluntary repatriation operation, however it is important to note that spontaneous return movements generally take place before and alongside an organised voluntary repatriation.

- Information dissemination is extremely important and should be an ongoing process. While there is a need to share information, it was noted that the focus should be on accompanying choices, rather than influencing decisions. All options should be available for refugees so that they have meaningful choices.

### **Discussion and questions**

- In response to a question regarding on-going options for resettlement, it was confirmed that refugees have been resettled to 14 different countries, but mostly to the US. The US Government has announced that there will be one more round of group resettlement, but thereafter resettlement would still be available on a case by case basis where needed (eg. on protection grounds). In addition, Australia and Japan have expressed willingness to resettle refugees from Thailand. Moreover, it was noted that some camps have exhausted the resettlement option; that is, that refugees are not choosing resettlement as an option.
- Camp populations are aware of the Myanmar government's plans for sub-townships, and the refugee community would like to know more about their options.
- Another participant asked why the movement of people in and out of the camps seemed to be greater than in the past, and why refugees were increasingly seeking opportunities inside Thailand. Secondly, why was UNHCR currently seeking to undertake a survey at this point in time, and might this not have an adverse effect in the minds of refugees?
- In response, it was noted that there has always been movement in and out of the camps, however in previous years this movement had been restricted. Increased movement could be seen as a result of, firstly, the protracted nature of the refugee situation (in which refugees were increasingly pursuing ways of becoming self-reliant) and secondly, the fact that people were increasingly thinking about their futures.
- Regarding the timing of the survey, UNHCR has been very cautious, and considerable time was invested in order to ensure that preparations were adequate and refugees fully consulted. It was highlighted that no names would be taken during the survey and that it would be clear that the survey was for planning purposes only.

#### **4. Updates from UNHCR Myanmar**

- 4.1 Participants were introduced to Simon Russell, Senior Protection Coordinator, who will be working on a framework for coordination and the development of common approaches to protection and durable solutions to displacement in the South East.
- 4.2 Staff from UNHCR Thailand office travelled to Hpa An at the end of April for the second UNHCR Thailand-Myanmar cross border meeting, which is a mechanism to ensure a common analysis and strategic vision between the UNHCR offices working on both sides of the border. As well as attending the cross border meeting, UNHCR staff also met with Kayin state government officials to discuss their perspectives on a potential voluntary repatriation of refugees in the future. UNHCR's key messages were for a safe, dignified and voluntary return, and respect for freedom of choice as to destination. The state government noted that their policy was in line with these principles. The State government also noted that return would not be a rapid process and that there were a number of challenges that should be addressed.

Representatives of the state government expressed their interest in receiving the results of the profiling exercise, and also emphasised the sub-townships were options for refugees and that refugees would have freedom of choice as to their place of return.

The Chief Minister raised the issue of criminals that may have been harboured in the refugee camps. This suggests that ongoing dialogue is necessary with the government in order to clarify any misperceptions whilst ensuring that any future return operation is designed on the basis of a strong protection framework.

Regarding durable solutions, he expressed the view that it will be necessary to coordinate closely with the government at the Union level to ensure consistency between states. It is hoped that the MPC will facilitate coordination. The Ministry of Immigration and NaTaLa should also be working together.

- 4.3 There was a mission from the Joint IDP Profiling Service (an interagency service based in Geneva) in March, jointly hosted by UNHCR, NRC, DRC and UNICEF. The mission undertook a scoping exercise, looking at the potential for a comprehensive profiling of IDPs in the Southeast. The primary purpose of the scoping was to assess the feasibility and desirability of a comprehensive profiling exercise, to identify whether there was consensus around the potential purpose and objectives of such an exercise. The team travelled to Kayah, Tanintharyi, and debriefed in Yangon. There were two key recommendations from the mission: i) there was support for profiling, however, any profiling exercise should relate to other needs assessments to avoid duplication; and ii) any profiling exercise should have a clear purpose, contributing to progress towards durable solutions. It was

stressed that a profiling should be a joint exercise, developed in consultation with the government and non-state actors, and would not be conducted by UNHCR alone. It would also be important to analyse existing data before undertaking further profiling.

4.4 It was noted that the framework for UNHCR's engagement for supporting durable solutions in the Southeast had been introduced at last meeting. It was highlighted that this document was not a blueprint, but rather, reflected key principles and directions for UNHCR's engagement in Southeast. This document should be a counterpart to the Framework for Voluntary Repatriation from UNHCR Thailand (October 2010), and should act as a tool in developing a framework with other actors. A copy of the document is attached to these minutes.

4.5 UNHCR has started to gather data on spontaneous movements of refugees from Thailand, in order to understand the dynamics, trends and protection risks to develop a suitable response for return. The monitoring mechanism will consist of two parts: i) *a return tracking log*, which tracks reports of returns from various sources (partners, government, field missions); and ii) *a return assessment tool*, where community-level assessments are conducted in locations where recent returnees are present.

Thus far, the findings from UNHCR in the South East coincide with information coming from Thailand; that is, small numbers of returnees mainly for go-and-see visits. The numbers of returning IDPs are higher, with less back-and-forth movements.

4.6 Ayaki Ito, Deputy Representative, presented a proposed approach to addressing the needs of refugees and IDPs who may return spontaneously, and not as part of an organised return operation. He noted that there was some evidence that small numbers of refugees and IDPs may already be opting for spontaneous return. Two key points were highlighted: firstly, the need to accompany choices and not to influence decisions; secondly, the need to have tools to capture information and respond to people who have made their choices.

UNHCR has developed an approach named, 'Integrated Support for Spontaneous Returnees' (ISSR). This would incorporate a range of protection and assistance activities across a range of sectors, delivered through a collaborative approach with agencies, NGOs and government in areas where the number of spontaneous returnees has reached a critical mass. A small-scale community-based approach should be encouraged to build confidence and support community cohesion.

The approach incorporates five key elements:

- i) The protection principle – to follow the flow of people;
- ii) A community-based approach;
- iii) Building confidence in return;

- iv) Partnership in action; and
- v) Linking to recovery and development in the South-East.

### **Discussion and questions**

- The Myanmar Peace Centre underscored the importance of close collaboration with the government. While it was clear from the government's side that return should be voluntary, it was noted that the government may face some constraints, for example, in the survey and profiling, and thus it would be important for actors to be alert to sensitivities and closely liaise with the government on their activities.
- Secondly, most refugees come from conflict areas, where trust is still to be built and where political settlement has not yet been reached. Thus there may be differing opinions as to the timing and most appropriate means of supporting return. UNHCR and other actors should also engage with NSAGs.
- Thirdly, regarding IDP profiling, the situation is quite different to the situation of refugees. IDPs have a close relationship with civil society in the region, and there should be support and coordination with civil society. Regarding refugees, any returns will hinge on the political process.
- Activities should be conducted in a conflict-sensitive manner. Thus MPC requested UNHCR and agencies to be conscious of the reality on the ground and the political context.
- The Chair noted that important points had been raised, which is why it is important to sit together and coordinate at government level and MPC and through government with NSAGs. UNHCR has been engaging with NSAGs and it is important that the return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees is supported within the framework of a broader peace building approach, and in a manner which contributes positively to the peace process.

## **6. Other Updates**

### **Malteser International**

- Malteser International has received a grant from the European Commission for a 3 year programme in conjunction with DCA and ADRA on health activities in Kayin state in both government and KNU controlled areas. DCA will conduct mine-risk awareness and there will also be activities for inclusiveness for persons with disabilities. There will be an induction workshop in Kayin state at the end of May.
- Several meetings have been held on sector convergence, particularly in malaria and reproductive health. There is a need to engage the government on the state

and Naypyidaw level. Meetings have been useful to coordinate treatment and how to improve capacities in Myanmar system. This has been effective and the Myanmar government should proceed in this sense in cooperation with NSAGs.

## **ACF**

- ACF is working with Mercy Corps on contributions to a multi-sector assessment. Data is being collected and initial results should be available on around 20 May.
- In Kayah state, ACF is working on WASH projects, food security and livelihoods, access to land, and income-generating activities in various villages. There is funding from the European Union, Danish and Swiss governments for activities targeted at building the capacity of communities to receive returnees (both IDPs and refugees).

## **NRC**

- NRC reported that at the end of February, they received an invitation from Karen and Karenni refugee committees to roll out an information campaign in all 9 camps in the coming months on the Moe Pwint civil documentation project. This is a nationwide project undertaken by the Ministry of Immigration, and supported by NRC in the South-East. The refugee community in camps have heard about the issue of identity documents, and they would like to know more information about the process in Myanmar. Next Tuesday the project will be rolled at in Mae Sariang camp. NRC hopes to collaborate with UNHCR on this project, which will take place over 3 months.
- UNHCR noted the importance of enabling access to information by refugees, while noting that it would be extremely important that any discussion of civil documentation does not give rise to misperception that registration for voluntary repatriation is being contemplated.

## **7. AOB**

- The European Union reported that the multi-sector assessment, funded by the EU, would be part of a joint assessment to ensure that duplication would not occur. There is 25 million Euros in funding for programmes. The EU will collaborate closely with MPC and others on the programmes.
- UNDP shared that it is re-orienting its activities to focus more on capacity-building in the South East. In particular, livelihoods support would be key as an investment for social cohesion. At the moment, UNDP is consulting with government on all levels as well as civil society, and will also look to MPC for support in approaching NSAGs. UNDP is also considering strengthening in the area of local governance. To this end, a series of consultations with Union and state government officials have been conducted in the hope of initiating capacity-

building activities. In Mon state, planning and budgeting has been discussed. UNDP has secured contributions from the Government of Japan and also the World Bank.

**8. Concluding Remarks (Chair):**

- Next meeting will be held in July, date and venue to be advised.
- UNHCR will share the JIPS report (once the final version is received) and also the durable solutions framework.

The meeting ended at 4pm.

UNHCR Yangon  
16.05.13