

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THAILAND  
AND  
WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

REPORT ON JOINT RELIEF PROGRAMMES FOR DISPLACED PERSONS IN THAILAND  
(Non Khmer Indochinese; Khmer and Affected Thai; Karen)

For the Period  
1st January to 31st December 1984

CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THAILAND  
14 Pramuan Road  
Bangkok 10500  
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The Thailand Burma Border Consortium was established in 1984 as the Consortium of Christian Agencies (CCA). Jack Dunford was Refugee Relief Coordinator with the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) and served as chair of CCA. No reports were written by CCA in the early years but the work of the Consortium was summarised in Annual CCT Refugee Programme reports which also included work with Indochinese refugees.

This report for 1984 are the sections relating to TBBC/CCA's work in the CCT Annual reports that year.

#### 4. KAREN REFUGEES

##### Background

- 4.1 Since this our first report on this situation the following notes serve as background information. They are mostly extracted from a talk given by Bertil Lintner at a CCSDPT Workshop on 28 November 1984.
- 4.2 The Karens are believed to be the largest minority group in Burma and to number over 3 million people out of a total population of around 35 million. They are generally assumed to have migrated to Burma from Mongolia in the 6th or 7th Century before the Burmans arrived in the 9th Century. The Karens had no political organisation of their own until the 19th Century. They were not highly regarded by other Burmese groups and were subject to frequent raids.
- 4.3 When 2 American Baptist Missionaries arrived in 1813 many of the Karens became Christians and when the British fought for control of Burma in 1826, 1852 and 1885 the Karens fought willingly on their side against the Burmans. Burma became part of British India and the British favoured the Karens ahead of other nationalities. Only Karens and Christian converts from other tribes were recruited into the first army and police units of the new colony. Many became civil servants and teachers.
- 4.4 The Karens showed little sympathy for the nationalist aspirations of the Burmese and in the 1930's fought with the British to crush Burmese rebellions. When the Japanese occupied Burma during World War II the Burmese Nationalists took revenge massacring thousands of Karen villagers thus creating bitter Karen hatred of the Burmese.
- 4.5 Towards the end of the war a good deal of anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare was being carried out by the minorities and at the end of the war when the British returned there was an uneasy truce between the Karens, the Burmese and the British. The British accepted the Burmese nationalist leader Aung San, even though he had collaborated with the Japanese. The Karens were worried and in 1946 they sent a Goodwill Mission to London to negotiate for a separate Karen state which would remain part of the British Commonwealth. The British were not interested and the Karens returned and began to build political and self-defence organisations. Burma was granted independence on 4 January 1948.
- 4.6 The Karen groups were soon in conflict with the new government and tensions and fighting eventually led to open confrontation in early 1949. At first the Karens had some success in capturing several major towns but since the early 1950's the Burmese Government has step by step driven the Karens out of one area after another. By 1975 the Karens had lost all their territory from the Delta region and in the Pegu Yoma Mountain Range north of Rangoon. They had retreated to the eastern hills bordering Thailand where a Karen war lord, Bo Mya, had established his own Karen National Liberation Army in 1966.
- 4.7 Bo Mya's group was economically very strong since it had established a thriving black market trade with Thailand after a military takeover in Burma in 1962 had resulted in a collapse in the Burmese economy. Bo Mya established toll-gates, levying taxes on goods passing through to Thailand and built up a wealthy power base with many Thai contacts.

In 1976 the old Karen political and military units were disbanded and merged into Bo Mya's KNU and the Karen National Liberation Army.

- 4.8 The Karen trading gates continued to thrive. Various sources have estimated that 70 to 80% of all consumer goods in Burma came through the Karen toll-gates before fighting escalated in 1984. As much as US\$3.7 million per year was estimated to have been derived by taxes imposed on this trade by the Karens. Unofficial estimates indicate that 25% of textiles produced in Bangkok were produced for sale in Burma and that 40% of all beef eaten in Bangkok is from Burma. Other major Karen exports were teak, minerals and semi-precious stones.
- 4.9 In recent years the Burmese have launched annual dry-season attacks on the Karen trading posts sometimes sending refugees across the Moei river into Thailand. These attacks were generally short-lived and when the Burmese withdrew at the on-set of the rains the Karens returned to plough and plant their crops as normal. During their brief sojourn in Thailand these refugees were often helped by the local Thai Karen population and by Missionary groups working in the area. During such an occasion in 1978 the World Council of Churches transferred funds to CCT to help with this support.

#### Events in 1984

- 4.10 Early in 1984 the Burmese launched offensives which were more intense and widespread than ever in the past and refugees entered Thailand in greater numbers than ever before. It was not long before the Karens were seeking assistance from every possible funding source and the Ministry of Interior was inviting Voluntary Agencies to give essential needs.
- 4.11 The Thai position was that the Karen be allowed temporary assylum but that only essential relief items be given. They insisted that the Karens must return to Burma at the earliest possible moment. There was no question of the Thai Government inviting the UNHCR or International Organisations to help in this effort. Thailand wished to retain good diplomatic relations with the Burmese Government and to invite in the IO's would amount to recognition of the Karen cause. The Voluntary Agencies were essentially asked to provide food and medicine and were advised not to help with buildings or anything which would be of a permanent nature or that would tend to attract new refugees.
- 4.12 Without UNHCR's or other IO's involvement the Voluntary Agencies decided it was necessary to coordinate their own efforts. In a rather unique way 7 Agencies decided to actually pool their financial resources and run a joint programme. These were World Vision, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship (TBMF), Thailand Baptist Mission, SOA (Committee for Aid to South East Asia), Mennonite Central Committee and CCT. TBMF opened a bank account for the programme and Dennis Tidwell, a Seventh Day Adventist Missionary based in Mae Sot acted as purchaser and liason person with the Karen Refugee Committee. The group became known as the "Consortium of Christian Agencies".
- 4.13 To bring in other interested Agencies CCSDPT formed a Karen Displaced Persons Sub Committee which was to meet monthly and which undertook to communicate the Agencies' involvement with the Ministry of Interior. The other main contributors in 1984 were International Christian Aid and COERR (the local Catholic relief organisation), and 3 French Medical Teams (MSF, MAP AND MDM) who undertook responsibility for

medical programmes.

- 4.14 With good cooperation between the Agencies it was possible to deal with the Karen in a reasonably coordinated manner and the Karen Refugee Committee assisted tremendously by producing monthly reports with full details of camp populations and the amount of assistance received from all sources.
- 4.15 When the rains began the Burmese troops remained in position and it soon became clear that the Karen would not be able to return and plant their crops and there was a need for a continuing programme. The Agencies concerned pledged themselves to continue this support if possible although, in accordance with Ministry of Interior wishes, agreed only to give essential requirements with no guarantee of longer term assistance.
- 4.16 Throughout the year there were 8,000 to 10,000 Karen refugees in upto 7 encampments along the Moei River in Tak Province. The Karen proved themselves to be very able and well organised and constructed quite attractive buildings themselves from bamboo and dried leaves found in the forests. Malaria is a major problem in this area but the French Medical teams were able to control this and there were no particular health problems. The other Voluntary Agencies provided mainly rice, dried fish or fish-paste, salt and chillies, the Karen people's main diet requirements. Throughout the year aid given was just a little less than the Karen's own estimate of their needs.

#### CCT/WCC involvement

- 4.17 As mentioned in paragraph 4.9 CCT had received funds for Karen refugees in 1978, but in fact these were never used. This money was therefore still available for use when the need arose in 1984 - a sum of US\$20,000. CCT agreed to work through the Consortium of Christian Agencies as described in paragraph 4.12 and made donations directly to the TBMF fund during the year.
- 4.18 Appendix C summarises the Karen Emergency Account for 1984. Table C1 sets out the CCT/WCC account showing a balance of £43,980 in hand at 31 December. Table C2 lists total contributions made to the "Consortium of Christian Agencies" funds during the year and Table C3 gives lists of commodities provided during the year both from Consortium funds and given direct by Consortium members. At the end of the year the Consortium fund retained a balance of £1,047,194.75.

APPENDIX C

KAREN EMERGENCY ACCOUNT

Table C1

SUMMARY OF CCT/WCC INCOME AND EXPENDITURES IN 1984

	<u>Cr.</u>	<u>Db.</u>
Carried forward from WCC 1978	£ 407,300.00	
Transfers (3) to Christian Consortium		£ 360,000.00
Travel and Administration		£ 3,320.00
Balance at 31 December 1984		43,980.00
	<u>£ 407,300.00</u>	<u>£ 407,300.00</u>
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Table C2

TOTAL 'CONSORTIUM' RECEIPTS IN 1984

World Vision	£ 1,633,150.00
Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship	1,235,666.50
CCT/WCC	360,000.00
ZOA	229,300.00
World Relief	114,497.00
Thailand Baptist Mission	100,000.00
ADRA	50,000.00
Miscellaneous	8,017.25
	<u>£ 3,799,330.75</u>
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Table C3

'CONSORTIUM' AID IN 1984

The following items were purchased from Consortium funds in 1984 leaving a balance in hand of £ 1,047,194.75 at 31st December:

4,240	Bags of rice (100 kgs).
166	Tins of fish paste
£ 100,000	Medicines

The following additional items were contributed directly by Consortium members:

£ 98,000	Medicines (ADRA)
1,515	Primary School Kits (ZOA)
100	Senior school Kits (ZOA)
1,502	Mosquito nets (ZOA)
£ 68,700	Bibles (ZOA)
130	Baby Kits (MCC)
4,620	Blankets (Christ Church)
7	Barrels of clothes (Christ Church)

MAP OF LOCATIONS OF KAREN  
DISPLACED PERSON ENCAMPMENTS  
IN TAK PROVINCE AUGUST 1984

• MAE SARIANG DISTRICT  
( MAE HONG SON PROVINCE )

— NATIONAL BORDER  
— RIVER

⊙ PROVINCE  
• DISTRICT

