

Media Release from European Karen Network

For immediate Release 4th February 2010

The European Karen Network (EKN) expresses great concern for the safety of the 3000 Karen refugees who are due to be deported back to Burma by the Thai Authorities. Latest reports are that so called 'voluntary' repatriation will start on February 5th.

The EKN calls on the Royal Thai government to work with the UNHCR, Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) and the international community to find an alternative solution that ensures the safety of these refugees. The refugees fled into Thailand in June 2009 following a military offensive by the Burmese Army and their allies, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), in Karen State, Eastern Burma. Many of these refugees had already been forced to flee their homes repeatedly before finally finding refuge in Thailand.

The "voluntary" repatriation, as it is being called, is anything but "voluntary". The refugees rightfully fear what awaits them upon their forced return. Forced labour and forced recruitment into regime-controlled armed forces are amongst the human rights abuses they will face. The danger of land mines is also very real.

We strongly urge the European Union to use its influence with the Royal Thai government and UNHCR, to act on behalf of these refugees who are fleeing from the Burma military Junta.