



REFUGEES REFUGIES FLÜCHTLINGE REFUGIADOS

February 1980/MS/CFN

THE REFUGEE SITUATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND PAKISTAN

(Staff members of the CICARWS Refugee Service have recently made visits to Southeast Asia and to Pakistan for the purpose of assessing the refugee situations in both places and reporting on how the churches are involving themselves in programmes of assistance to the refugees. Mercedes Saitzew visited four countries in Southeast Asia between January 16 and February 4, and Carl P. Nielsen was in Pakistan from February 2 to 13.)

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Malaysia

My visit coincided with the preparation for the transfer of the first group of Vietnamese boat people from the Camp on Pulau Bidong to the Refugee Processing Centre (RPC) at Bataan, Philippines. The operation itself was hampered by unforeseen complications. A belated monsoon cut off the island from the town and airport of Trengganu, delaying everything. To make things worse, drinking water was also getting scarce.

According to various sources, if the departures continue at the present rate of 3-4,000 persons per month and the arrivals do not substantially increase, the bulk of the resettlement operation will be completed by the end of 1980. There is some concern, though, about the high percentage of rejections for whom special efforts will have to be made, where possible with the backing of voluntary agency sponsorships.

Transit Camp Cheras Batu No.7 is as over-crowded as in former months, but the refugees know they are on their way to the USA and bear discomfort with equanimity. Other camps grow more comfortable as the population decreases; except for periodical drinking water shortages, all other amenities are adequate and each camp has at least one place of worship. The largest camp, Pulau Bidong, has three churches (Roman Catholic, Christian and Reformed) and a Buddhist temple. If the diminishing trend continues, the smaller camps will presently be closed and the refugees divided between Pulau Bidong and Pulau Tengah.

Perhaps the hardest to bear in Malaysian camps is the isolation; there is no contact with the outside world except through mail, persons involved in refugee work and, in Kuala Lumpur, a group of diplomats' wives who were permitted to organize some recreation for refugees, particularly the children, in transit camps.

Since the government of Malaysia has entrusted all refugee work to the Malaysian Red Crescent Society, the role of the churches has not been great. In indirect ways, though, churches have helped by encouraging their parishioners to become members of and work through the Red Crescent. There also is the possibility of an identifiable participation of the churches in long-range programmes which may be developed

for physically and mentally handicapped refugees. Such work could be done in centres which could gradually be made available also to low-income Malaysians.

Philippines

The National Council of Churches of the Philippines (NCCP) has taken full cognisance of the problems arising from the presence of Indo-chinese boat people and formed an Ecumenical Refugee Committee to organize and deliver services to refugees.

The NCCP through its Executive Committee approved a resolution to appeal to the government of the Philippines and other governments to grant asylum to and provide permanent resettlement opportunities for the refugees. Indeed, the resolution went further than that, addressing itself not only to the government but also to the people of the Philippines and asking them to help bring the refugees out of the isolation of camps during their stay in the Philippines.

It might be premature to indulge in speculations with regard to permanent settlement, but a look at the statistics shows that 11 Indo-chinese refugees were admitted as legal immigrants, probably for the purpose of family reunion. It is a small but significant indication that at least persons with family ties would be acceptable.

The NCCP appealed also to the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to remove the causes which are driving the people out of the country. Since the NCCP considers its refugee work part of the overall struggle for human rights, mention should be made also of its appeal to the government of the Philippines to lift martial law.

The NCCP refugee programme has the full support of its member churches. Bataan has a strong Protestant community which, even before the initiation of the official programme, was reporting the arrival of boats to the NCCP, advising refugees to report to the constabulary and being generally helpful.

The NCCP's first major involvement was with assistance to the refugees on the ship Tung An, carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of National Defence. Later, clothing, blankets, medicines and ointments were distributed to the camps on Lubang and Tara islands. Lubang was meanwhile closed down, and presumably Tara camp will be closed too, leaving only the reception camp in Puerto Princessa City on the Palawan island, the processing centre at Bataan, and the Transit Camp Fabella in Manila, which in January housed 1,125 persons en route to the U.S.A and other countries.

Late in 1979 the NCCP worked out and submitted to the World Council of Churches a long range programme for a period of three to five years. It is proposed that two full-time social workers will be employed, one as coordinator in Manila, and one at Bataan or Palawan. At present the work on Palawan is carried out by the Rev. Rafael M. Macabuaq who is also in charge of the programme of Rural Education for the Development in Narrah and aims to make refugee work an integral part of it.

Grants of money from WCC Geneva are augmented by the NCCP's own funds and donations from local churches.

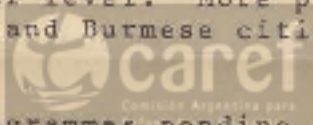
The first group of 200 persons was transferred from Tara to Bataan in early January 1980. The next arrivals are scheduled for early February 1980, and the breakdown according to country is as follows:

2,000	from Malaysia	
1,000	" Philippines	<u>Transportation</u>
5,500	" Thailand	5,500 Philippine Navy
1,500	" Hong Kong	<u>4,500 ICEM by air</u>
10,000	total	10,000 total

A second 10,000 are due in late February; the breakdown will be given at a later date. It is hoped that this second group will include also refugees registered for countries other than the U.S.A. If Bataan is to be utilized to its full capacity, either countries other than the U.S.A. will have to be persuaded to pledge placements as required, or the government of the Philippines prevailed upon to admit to Bataan also refugees whose further resettlement is not adequately assured.

Burma

Two years since my last visit, Rangoon looked much more alive and generally in better repair. Colleagues confirmed that things have been improving on the local level. More people, mainly tourists, are coming to the country and Burmese citizens now had the opportunity to travel abroad.



The three main country programmes pending development are:

- 1) Participation in the building of some 40 miles of highway between the Chin State and Central Burma. When completed, the highway will facilitate the exchange of goods and provide a vital link between the Chin minority and the Burmese majority. The project foresees the purchase of a Caterpillar-Bulldozer D4, which will be operated by TICPND (Training Institute for Christian Participation in National Development) technical personnel to help establish contact with and inaugurate a rural development programme for some 5,000 highway construction workers recruited from Chin villages stricken with poverty. Other specialized staff to participate in the programme will come from the Departments of rural health, social and formal education, agricultural experts, etc. The curriculum will be rather tightly packed, so as to enable the 5,000 construction workers to use the acquired knowledge when they return to their villages in two or three years. It sounds like an excellent project which will enable TICPND to cooperate on an important government project and at the same time promote development education among villagers of the poorest state, who otherwise would be very difficult to reach.
- 2) Integrated rural development programme of the Irrawaddy Delta. TICPND already maintains rural health projects in two villages and considers that the time has come to widen the programme contents and cover the whole area. The programme has been given full support by the local population, which is anxious to see it expanded and made accessible to as many people as possible.

- 3) Kachin has just celebrated the first centenary of the establishment of the Baptist Church. To commemorate the event in a lasting way, the churches would like to build a Development Village. However, the village is not meant to be a dead monument but will be used to meet the very urgent need of providing permanent or temporary accommodation to people coming from other parts of Burma or expelled from China, and requiring rehabilitation with a view to permanent settlement. Like the other programmes, the Kachin Village would offer development education in its widest sense.

The churches have not been involved in the re-establishment of the returnees from Bangladesh in Arakan. The reintegration of the returnees to Arakan is making good progress under the auspices of UNHCR, and their status in Burma has been legalized.

Thailand

The heavy burden which Thailand has carried since 1975 when the first wave of Indochinese refugees swept over the country became still heavier since the recent arrival of 150,000 refugees from Kampuchea. At the same time the influx from Laos continues undiminished, and the number of boat people from Vietnam in January 1980 was the highest in Southeast Asia.

Holding Centres for Displaced Persons from Kampuchea

It would be presumptuous on the strength of a brief visit to pretend expertise or venture prognoses in a situation fraught with so many imponderables.

Accommodation and other facilities seemed adequate and special efforts are being made to overcome the perennial water problem. The condition of the DPs is more difficult to define: many youngish men and women in surprisingly good physical and mental shape; children looking as if they had never known war or privation. But also hundreds of emaciated and ill DPs of all ages in hospital surgeries and sick wards. Although the mortality rate had much decreased, in some cases it will take a long time to heal the effects of malnutrition. There are possibly numerous latent psychical afflictions which will have to be coped with at a later date.

I was able to talk with a number of DPs, as well as with UNHCR, ICRC and various medical staff stationed in the centres. The majority of DPs live in the present, enjoying the simple fact of being alive, safe, with a roof over their heads and enough to eat. In a curiously detached way they wait to return home, and all programmes are based on the assumption that they will be able to, although perhaps not quite as soon as they might wish. There are at present no plans for a general resettlement to other countries, and international staff in the camps were most apprehensive lest a visitor should kindle vain hopes. Many DPs are trying to trace their families through ICRC, and some 100 persons have already joined relatives in other countries.

The problem of unaccompanied minors was much discussed, and most people agree that:

- barring emergencies, minors should not leave for other countries until all reasonable means to trace their parents or other relatives willing to take care of them have been exhausted;

- the sentiment "minors should not be removed from their cultural background" was too simplistic. Main arguments: Thailand and Kampuchea have little in common; repatriation was the best solution only if it was known where the minors will be placed and there was a possibility of a follow-up.

In the meantime, the UNHCR project for unaccompanied minors was recommended for assistance by voluntary agencies, this being the best interim solution until permanent homes were found within or outside Asia.

Camp Nong Khai

Although the refugee population has very substantially decreased since July 1979, Nong Khai looks both larger and less like a camp. Many inhabitants have settled down and started small cafeterias, shops, workshops, etc. There is also a huge market with both Thais and refugees offering their merchandise. With all due respect to more exalted institutions, there is nothing like a market when it comes to integration. People not likely to meet or speak to each other do so in a market, everybody has something to buy or sell, contacts are easily established.

An average of 1,000 persons attend various classes in the Church of Christ in Thailand/World Council of Churches workshop, which is to be enlarged to include carpentry and associated building trades. There is further a project to ensure better health care by refugee nursing staff, and two projects combining employment and benefits for both refugees and Thai villagers, which it is hoped will gradually lead to a merger of certain refugee and country projects.

Drawing from the experience of their family planning programme in Chiang Mai, the CCT intends to complement existing state facilities by providing more individual counselling, including home visits.

The Protestant community of 200 souls includes several converts. Formerly animists, they explained their decision by a need for moral support in difficult times.

Camp Pak Chom

Already on my first visit to Pak Chom in January 1978 I thought that it looked more like a village than a camp and that its inhabitants had easier contact with Thai peasants than other refugees. It seemed the ideal place for local settlement. Coming to the camp now, I was delighted to see that UNHCR had just completed a number of asbestos houses into which the refugees will be moving in the near future.

The camp's population is entirely Hmong/Meo, and the government intends to transfer all refugees of this ethnic group to Pak Chom. Hmongs formerly in Nong Khai had already arrived. There is a Christian Community of 3,000 persons, all formerly members of the Evangelical Church of Laos, i.e. three times as many as the Protestant Community in Udorn. A request for the enlargement of the church which the refugees built in 1976 is under consideration by CCT, but a more permanent structure matching the rest of the camp might be worth considering.

The number of arrivals and departures is 3,000 per month both ways, but many of the refugees we met said they would like to remain in Thailand. Pastoral care is ensured by two Hmong pastors.

There is also a need for a social worker to help with the integration of these hill people to adjust to new surroundings, particularly to new housing. The majority of the refugees are farmers, but theirs was a different type of farming and an agricultural expert, perhaps from the Christian Service Training Centre in Udorn, should advise them. Here is indeed a wide field for CCT activity, based on its traditional ties with the Evangelical Church in Laos.

Other Projects to be resumed by CCT are assistance to Karen refugees in Maesaering and the settlement of Yao refugees in Pak Klonlan.

By way of a change from the refugee scene, I accompanied V. McAnallen and the new Minister of the International Church, Rev. R. Smith, on a visit to the CCT Project "Klong Toey Community Service Centre" in Bangkok.

The Centre provides biblical education and counselling services to slum dwellers who come to Bangkok from different parts of Thailand in search of work and what they hope will be a better life. There are also a kindergarden and primary schools for their children. As all slum shacks were erected without approval by the building authority, they are officially non-existent and their inhabitants are consequently unable to register with the police. In practice this means that they are non-existent, too; unable to enroll their children in school, enter a regular employment or claim any social assistance. Their situation hardly differs from that of illegal immigrants, but they cling to Bangkok, partly because they have nothing to go back to and partly because all hope that one day they will make it in the big city.

The CCT project gives some basic schooling to the children and tries to help the parents to regularize their situation. The authorities are anxious to see the slums disappear and have moved a number of people to new apartment houses built for this purpose. However, the rents are high; tenants who cannot pay are evicted and find themselves once more in slums.

The churches in Southeast Asia continue to care for a wide range of refugees through projects adapted to these refugees' particular situations and needs. The churches are often among the first to render help, just as they go on assisting refugees as long as there is a need, which usually means long after international attention and international funds have focused on newer and more spectacular issues. If there is merit in prompt action, there is also at least equal merit in perseverance and in bringing what was begun to a good conclusion.

PAKISTAN

General Situation -- As of mid-February 1980 an estimated 750,000 refugees from Afghanistan had fled to neighbouring Pakistan. By March the number is expected to reach a million. Most of the Afghan refugees are in the North West Frontier Province (NWF) around Peshawar and the Khyber Pass, with smaller numbers in the province of Baluchistan to the southwest. An unknown number of refugees have also sought safety in Iran. Most of the refugees in Baluchistan, who number at least 80,000, live in camps, while in NWF hundreds of thousands live with relatives or have otherwise been absorbed into the population. The camp population in each of the two provinces is about the same: somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000.

The flow of refugees from Afghanistan started shortly after the coup in April 1978 which resulted in the ouster of President Daud, who was succeeded by President Taraki. Throughout 1979 the refugee exodus steadily increased, reaching an average of 20,000 per month during the first eight months of that year. The removal in September of President Taraki by his Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin marked a large increase in the refugee exodus. By the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, the influx of refugees into Pakistan had created problems of such magnitude that the government appealed to the international community to support its relief work, an effort which since has been steadily accelerating.

Assistance Being Given -- The government of Pakistan accepts the basic responsibility for humanitarian care to the refugees from Afghanistan. Under government supervision, a division of labour has evolved between various inter-governmental, international and national organizations participating. An initial agreement for aid amounting to US\$10 million was signed between the government of Pakistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a sum which recently was revised to US\$55 million based on an estimated 500,000 refugees requiring care throughout 1980. Approximately one-half of the revised figure will be for foodstuffs through the World Food Programme. Supplies of medicines are coming from UNICEF, while UNDP furnishes tents and tarpaulins. The Pakistan government in cooperation with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies arranges for necessary transport. The government also pays to each refugee a daily cash allowance of 4 rupees, about US 40 cents. The Inter-Aid Committee (IAC), an indigenous ecumenical agency through which already-existing Protestant and Catholic churches and related organizations work, has been extremely effective in meeting the basic needs of refugees in most of Baluchistan and in some of the remoter areas of the NWF. Numerous church-related and other agencies have responded to the appeals issued by the IAC, which now total US\$5.2 million: Norwegian Church Aid/Norwegian Refugee Council; Diakonisches Werk/Brot für die Welt/KED, Germany; Christian Aid, U.K.; Swiss Church Aid (HEKS); Danish Church Aid; Church World Service, U.S.A.; Oxfam, U.K.; Sisters of Charity, Rome; Caritas, Germany; Catholic Relief Services, U.S.A.; Caritas, Belgium; Caritas, Norway; Caritas, Netherlands; the Vatican; Australian Catholic Relief; CAFOD, U.K. A number of other agencies have also given indications of interest in supporting the IAC efforts.

The most urgently needed relief items continue to be food, tents and tarpaulins, warm clothing, blankets, quilts and medicines. Of the US\$2.5 million actually remitted to the IAC by mid-February, a total of US\$2 million has been spent for these goods and delivered to the refugees most in need of them. As there seems little probability that the refugees will be able to return to Afghanistan in the near future, the IAC is also studying the need for longer-term assistance in the form of self-help and rehabilitation projects.

The position of the World Council of Churches/CICARWS is that it supports the appeals of the IAC, urging donors to make contributions directly to it.

Impressions From a Visit -- In the company of the Rev. Zahiruddin Mirza of the Church of Pakistan in Quetta, I visited several refugee camps in the vicinity of Pishin on February 7. Quetta, the provincial capital of Baluchistan, is about 32 km. (20 mi.) from the Afghanistan border, and Pishin is a district headquarters where we obtained permission to visit the Surkhab camps. The altitude there was about 1,700 m. (5,500 ft.), the landscape barren, windswept and dusty. The temperature was around the freezing point, and snow lay in sheltered places. Approximately 8,000 Afghans live in tents and covered dugouts in this place. They came to Pakistan no longer than six months ago, and we saw one group of 700 who had arrived just three days earlier and were busy establishing themselves by pitching tents or digging room-sized holes in the ground, which then would be covered with tarpaulins. Both tents and tarpaulins had been supplied by the IAC and were marked as such in Arabic.

The refugees had been villagers in Afghanistan, and when asked why they had fled, their reply was most often "religion." In general terms, they meant by this that the Afghan governments since President Taraki had increasingly interfered with their traditional ways of life until they finally found it intolerable and decided to leave. For many the decisive point occurred late in the year when anti-insurgency operations against Afghan rebel groups were intensified. The refugees I saw had come in family groups, so men, women and children were present. Some had also come with their flocks, but these were little in evidence. The people appeared to be a tough and wiry lot, obviously poor but seemingly not discouraged. These refugees spoke Pushtu and had come to an area where perhaps 40% of the Pakistanis are also Pushtu-speaking. Their source of water was the stream along which the several Surkhab camps are located. Brushwood collected in the vicinity provided fuel for the fire in each tent or shelter. Foodstuffs had been donated by the World Food Programme. Rev. Mirza and I were received with the utmost courtesy, and the refugees spoke of their hopes to return to their villages in Afghanistan, "... but only after the invaders leave."

A theory has been advanced that the Afghan refugees in Pakistan are actually nomads and that there have been in recent weeks no new arrivals. According to everyone with whom I spoke on this point, these reports are false, and, as noted above, I myself visited a camp where 700 people had just arrived. By definition, nomads come and go, and of the some 70,000 refugees whom the UNHCR has classified as nomads -- less than 10% of the estimated total Afghan refugee population in Pakistan -- none is reported to have returned.

The IAC, which stands in high favour with the refugees, had furnished the newcomers in the Surkhab camps not only with tents and tarpaulins, but also shoes, cold-weather outer clothing, blankets and quilts. The Pakistan government had set up a tent dispensary and out-patient clinic stocked with medicines from UNICEF and served by a health inspector who went from camp to camp. At the time of our visit he had 60 bed-ridden cases, and he named the chief complaints as bronchitis, diarrhoea, pneumonia and measles in that order of frequency.

It is government policy to isolate the refugees on public land in places like the Surkhab camps. This is because clashes have occurred between some groups of refugees and local people when the former were given temporary accommodation in and around towns and villages. Apart from linguistic differences, tensions have arisen because Baluchistan is an exceedingly poor place with a high rate of unemployment. Refugees in competition against local people for what few jobs there are are going to be resented, and so are handouts to refugees of free food, clothing, medicines and money.

Hopes and Prospects

The Afghan refugees pose a highly sensitive problem to the government of Pakistan. It fears the destabilizing influence of these unemployed foreigners in some of the poorest and traditionally most rebellious parts of the country. It suspects that agents may have infiltrated with the refugees. Its acceptance of responsibility for the humanitarian needs of the refugees can also be seen as assertion of control over security matters arising out of their presence.

There are reports that many of the arriving Afghans belong to families or tribes whose men remained behind as guerrilla fighters or who intend to return once they have acquired weapons. To the extent that these reports are true, assistance to the refugees of any kind, even humanitarian, is a politicized act. Under such circumstances, Pakistan's wish to avoid undue complications because of the refugees is understandable, and it is therefore likely that Pakistan will continue to stress the purely humanitarian and international nature of its response to refugee needs.

There seems no likelihood that conditions in Afghanistan will allow repatriation of the refugees in the near future. Put another way, the refugees will stay in Pakistan as long as the Russians stay in Afghanistan. This is borne out by what one hears throughout Pakistan, including what the refugees themselves say. Their explanation of "religion" as the reason for leaving Afghanistan evidently has its roots in the attempts at laud reform initiated by the Taraki government after it came to power in April 1978. At the same time, efforts were made to undermine the Moslem religion and, worst of all for a deeply traditional and male-dominated people, the revolutionary government pushed new rights for women, allowing them for instance to marry without their parents' consent. It was in sum an attempt to break down Islamic rule in Afghanistan by eroding the power and influence of village chiefs, of the religious leaders, and even of parents. These moves by the new government were highly offensive to the Afghans and led directly to the onset of guerrilla warfare and the refugee exodus. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that as long as an Afghan government committed to such changes remains in power, the guerrillas will continue with armed resistance and the refugees will

stay in Pakistan. Perhaps the best hope for any large-scale repatriation lies in the proposal for neutralizing Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Afghan refugees wait. Once their immediate needs for relief have been met, the government and cooperating agencies are going to have to turn their attention to other kinds of assistance. It was noted above that already the IAC is studying this problem, and it detects several complex issues which will have to be solved. One concerns the local needy, of whom there are many in both Baluchistan and the NWF. A second issue is that concerning Christian-Moslem relationships. The IAC is asking itself just how far it can extend its operations without falling under suspicion of wishing in some way to proselytize the newcomers and perhaps also Pakistanis. A third issue, related to the first two, is whether the IAC and other agencies will be able to commit themselves to development work extended over a period of several years until local groups are in a position to assume the work. Barring repatriation of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, then, the international assistance community must once again face the enormous task of helping provide services to large numbers of homeless people -- services that will restore them as soon as possible to health, security and self-sufficiency.



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Refugee Service, CICARWS
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1211 Geneva 20,
Switzerland

1. Correct my address as follows:

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2. Delete my name from your mailing list.

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Signed:

Date: