



July 2009

NEWS



FNF Board Member Meets Thai Foreign Minister in Bangkok

A board member of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) made a courtesy call to Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya on the sidelines of his visit to Bangkok as a guest speaker for a training workshop.

During their meeting on 23 June 2009 at the Foreign Ministry, Mr. Kasit commended the FNF for its contribution to public education and understanding of democracy. He expressed hope that the work of the Foundation in Southeast Asia, especially Thailand, would be expanded so that people in this region would benefit from a stronger democratic culture and wider scale of citizen participation in democratic process in their respective country.

To expand its activities in Thailand, Mr. Kasit recommended that the Foundation work with the Political Development Council, King Prajadhipok's Institute, Thai Parliament, the Foreign Ministry and the National Economic and Social Advisory Council.

Mr. Manfred Richter was in Bangkok for a training workshop, titled "Organisational Development in A Changing Political Environment".

Mr. Richter, 61, is a member of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) of Germany as well as an independent consultant on politics and political campaigns. A former MP, party executive, mayor and campaign strategist in his home country, he is among the most sought-after speakers on political management and campaigning.

FNF Joins Thai Election Commission in 11th Anniversary Celebration

Dr. Rainer Adam, head of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation's Southeast & East Asia office, was invited to speak at a special seminar held as part of the Election Commission of Thailand's 11th anniversary celebration.

He was invited to deliver a keynote speech at the seminar, titled "77 years of Learning Democracy in Thailand and 11 Years of the Establishment of the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand" on 9 June 2009.

The ECT has long been a partner of the FNF, working together on several training workshops related to election and democracy education.



The celebration took place at the Government Complex Commemorating His Majesty the King's 80th Birthday Anniversary. The election watchdog also chose the anniversary day as the first opening day of its new library.

Other speakers were representatives from civil society and NGOs that play a role in promoting democracy. Mr. Bjoern Foerde, director of the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, spoke on "Civic Education for Democratic Development". Ms. Yvonne Goudie, a coordinator from the BRIDGE Civic education Development Project, spoke on "Civic Education for Democratic Development: the Australian Experience". Dr. Prinya Thaewanarumitkul, associate dean at Thammasat University, spoke about "Civic Education and Democratic Development".

FNF Workshop: Creative Ways for Political Parties To Attract Public Involvement

There are several ways political parties with little funding can strengthen their public image while at the same time attract involvement and support from voters.

"Lack of money is no excuse for lack of activities," said Manfred Richter, a 61-year-old board member of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Local branches of political parties can, for example, organise debates on issues that are of primary concern or current interest to people in their respective community.



Even if the party is not represented in the local authorities, its representative can serve as a neutral facilitator for the debate before declaring the party's stance. He could say, for example, what the party would do if it won the mandate. It could also volunteer to raise the matter with so-and-so governmental agency or local authority, Mr. Richter added. He was speaking at the workshop, titled "Organisational Development in A Changing Political Environment" on 22-25 June 2009 in Bangkok. It was attended by staff from the Democrat Party's headquarters and branch offices.

Political parties can publish draft copies of their policy papers on different issues or government projects on the Internet and invite members of the general public to read and post comments. They can also invite relevant interest groups for a face-to-face meeting to comment on a particular draft policy paper. For example, teachers might be invited to comment on education policy papers and doctors on public healthcare policy papers.

Comments are then assessed and selected to appear in the final copies of the policy papers. From his long experience as an MP and executive of a political party, this method works and often results in about 20% of the meeting participants voluntarily signing up for party membership.

Insufficient staff is also no excuse for not conducting activities to stay in touch with the local community. Political parties can recruit volunteers who are willing to put their skills to good use. There many ordinary citizens out there who want to participate but don't know what and how they can get involved; hence, the job of the political party to inform the public, said the former mayor of Bremerhaven.

Political parties can also contribute to the organising of sports events to strengthen ties with people in the community. All these activities require little funding, which is a common problem with many political parties. They also open up channels of communication between the party and local voters, Mr. Richter said. The party will learn what the local people need and design strategies, plans and activities accordingly.

To be effective, the political party must first decide what kind of public image it wants to project and the core common message that it wants to communicate to voters in all of its activities. It should not get involved in just any kind of activity for the sake of having an activity with the local people.

Public involvement benefits not only the party but also the local citizens themselves. It is an important element of liberal democracy in which people are free and willing to participate in democratic process. They have the right to express their opinion in solving common problems and exercise it in a democratic manner. Overtime, this practice will develop into a culture of citizen involvement and in turn strengthen democracy in their country.

Dr. Rainer Adam, head of the FNF regional office for Southeast & East Asia, presided over the opening of the workshop. Ms. Arporn Rong-ngeun, deputy director-general of the Democrat Party, gave a briefing on the current situation of the ruling party, including its strengths and challenges.

The workshop was divided into several topics with input and responses from the speaker and the participants. They included "Organisation – The Road to Political Success," "Reducing the Party's Weaknesses," "An Overseas Case Study - Strategic Organisational Goals of the Free Democratic Party of Germany," "Achieving and Sustaining Competitive Advantage," "Learning from Strategies of Commercial Enterprises," and "Charting the Course from Good to Great."

Participants worked on group assignments to assess the party's strengths and weaknesses in relation to rival parties, comment on internal communication within the party, express their ideas of a dream party branch, and draft plans to organise low-budget activities. Each group presented their findings and learned from their colleagues.

Mr. Richter emphasized that communication--whether within the party or between the party and the general public--has to be two-way to be effective. People want to be heard and get involved. Political parties can benefit from new and interesting ideas by simply opening up channels of communication and being open-minded, he concluded.



YLDA Conducts Electoral Observation Mission

To understand the political context in which its members operate, the Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia (YLDA) visited Indonesia from 22 -25 June 2009 on an electoral observation mission.

YLDA President Jan-Argy Tolentino and Programme Officer Rosanna Ocampo met with representatives from its two youth groups, the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the Indonesian Party of Struggle (PDI-P) to observe how they organise the youth during an election period. They also visited the campaign centres of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), Megawati-Prabowo and Jusuf Kalla (JK) – Wiranto at Tangerang, Banten.

As supporters of SBY's re-election bid, PKB invited Tolentino and Ocampo to attend one of SBY's campaign events. PDI-P on the other hand supports Megawati-Prabowo. YLDA met with PDI-P youth organizer, Hanjaya Setiawan. He explained the campaign's organisational structure, activities and issues.

In order to learn more about the third presidential contender, YLDA also visited the JK-Wiranto campaign headquarters. Binny Buchory, a member of their campaign team, discussed their platforms and communication strategies.

The YLDA electoral mission was supported by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

FAN Training: Strategic Political Communication

By Dr. Pimrapaat Dusadeeisariyakul, FNF Malaysia Programme Manager

FAN Malaysia, an alumni network of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, organised a workshop on Strategic Political Communication in Kuala Lumpur on 13 June 2009.



The training workshop was modeled after a workshop on this subject provided by the FNF's International Academy for Leadership (IAF) in Germany. However, it was adjusted to suit locals' needs and shortened to one day instead of a week. The event provided an opportunity for former graduates to IAF seminars to share knowledge and practical work experience with fellow country citizens working in the fields of politics, human rights and related NGO.

Ibrahim Suffian, director of the independent Merdeka Center research firm, and Dr. Zaliha Mustafa, a well-known university lecturer on politics and senior member of the People's Justice Party, were guest speakers. Dr. Pimrapaat Dusadeeisariyakul, FNF Malaysia Project manager, moderated the workshop.

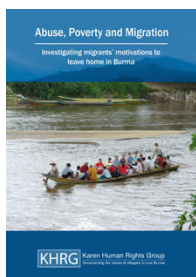
Dr. Pimrapaat gave an overview of the concept of Strategic Political Communication, including identifying target groups and developing political messages that appeal to them.

Dr. Zaliha, who had attended an IAF seminar on political strategies in 2007, simplified the concept by relating it to her practical experience as a candidate for a parliamentary seat in a Johor constituency in the March 2008 general election. As a candidate, she had to project a unique public image different from that of other candidates and design a plan to get her intended message across to voters, she said.

Mr. Ibrahim spoke on crafting a political message, which tells people what your party is about, what your ideals are, what your party believes in and how it will make a difference to people's lives if elected to power. The message also tells people what your party is going to do and makes clear the difference between your party and other parties. It gives people a rational reason to vote for you. The message should address issues that voters are worried about as well as the party's and the candidate's stance on them. Key message must

be relevant to voters, based on facts and appeal to them intellectually and emotionally, said Mr. Ibrahim who had attended an IAF seminar on political communication in 2007.

Participants included members of political parties, civil society organisations and staff from a polling agency. Ng Cheah Wearn, the facilitator, said in her evaluation that "the presentation done by all three speakers were really good and caught the interest of the participants. Good examples were presented. Everybody enjoyed and participated actively during the whole process."



NGOs to Thai Government: Stop Talking Technicality and Start Protecting Burmese Migrants' Rights

By Warangkana Tempati, FNF Communications Manager

Two NGOs are urging the Thai Government to put words into action: stop categorizing Burmese fleeing atrocities in their home country as refugees or migrants and give them human rights protection.

Just a couple of months after the promulgation of the ASEAN Charter in November 2007, the Thai Government came under fire when it was accused of sending Rohingya people who escaped prosecution from the Burmese junta back into the sea on mortarless boats, resulting in several deaths. Bangkok, which is the current ASEAN chair, reportedly insisted that these Rohingya people, a stateless Muslim minority in Burma, were not "refugees" but "illegal migrants" and should be sent back to the military-ruled country.

Many migrants fit the definition of a political refugee. Yet, they are often perceived as voluntarily leaving their home country to seek better economic opportunities. On the contrary, refugees are perceived with a more sympathetic attitude as victims who are forced to escape armed conflict or human rights abuses in their home countries, said Ms. Jackie Pollock, director of the Migrant Assistance Programme (MAP) Foundation.

In reality, sometimes the only difference between a migrant and a refugee is that the former chooses to work and live outside a camp so that he can earn money and support relatives back home who have not been able to escape while the latter chooses to live in camps provided by the hosting country. "Rather than categorizing people as refugees or migrants, we should look at their needs." Ms. Pollock said. "People who have been traumatized need to be provided a safe place to stay. I don't think refugee camps provide that."

At the MAP's joint press conference with the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) on 16 June, the two NGOs were calling for increased human rights protection for Burmese migrants and refugees as well as transparent recruitment process of migrant workers to beat human trafficking.

Abuses and poverty brought by military rule are the causes of migration. The NGO activists at the press conference agreed that ASEAN lacks the teeth to enforce its own charter, which outlines the creation of a regional human rights body and human rights protection for ASEAN citizens. Still, the presence of a written agreement gives them a solid footing to present their demands.

While there is little other countries can do to stop the Burmese junta from carrying out abuses, they have control over their national policies and can help migrants by granting them opportunities to work and stay legally, said Ms. Pollock.

The lack of a legal and transparent system of migrant employment creates loopholes for traffickers to take advantage of people who are already living in harsh conditions. Many illegal migrant workers are underpaid by their employers and also have to pay excessive fees to traffickers who brought them to Thailand, she added.

In its 16 June press release, the KHRG calls governments to make use of existing human rights laws to establish a strong international framework that can better protect human rights of migrants from Burma and other migrant workers in vulnerable situations.

Allowing Burmese migrants to stay and work legally benefits not only migrants but also hosting countries. The transparency of the process will eliminate the problem of human trafficking and criminal rings while yielding economic benefits for hosting countries. For migrants, legal employment and protected labour rights mean less likelihood of abuses by the employer, better access to school and medical services, said Ms. Pollock.

"The difficulty is finding the political will to accept that these migrants have rights that they are already entitled to as human beings," Ms. Pollock said about her work. Traumatized people who escape abuses need to be given choices to survive: either give them the right to work legally as migrant workers or grant them permanent resettlement, she added.

She commended a compromise Thailand had recently made in granting citizenship to migrants. Children of migrants whom the Thai government issued cards for as stateless people will be granted Thai citizenship. These cards are valid for ten years but their holders, the parents, are not granted citizenship.

Burma has been under military rule of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) since 1988 control despite a legitimate landslide victory of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in the general election in that year.

Given the junta's continued human rights abuses and frequent armed battles between the SPDC and smaller armed groups within the country, there is a trend towards more people fleeing into Thailand, KHRG Field Director Poe Shan said. Most recently, about 3,000 villagers fled to Thailand after the SPDC launched attacks on a Karen National Liberation Army camp on 2 June.

"People are not just leaving homes to find a better place to live," said Mr. Shan. "They are escaping abuses and poverty brought by the SPDC rule."

KHRG conducted more than 150 interviews with residents of Karen state in Eastern Burma for the report "Abuse, Poverty and Migration," released at the press conference in Bangkok. Seventy-eight percent of migrant workers interviewed cited exploitative abuses such as forced military recruitment, forced labour, extortion, land confiscation, arbitrary taxation, fear of prosecution, arbitrary beating and arrest as reasons for escaping Burma. "It's a matter of survival," said September Paw, a Karen spokesperson for the report.

The report, which includes interviews of Burmese migrant workers, details of the findings on their conditions and factors behind their migration, is available for free download at <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2009/khrg0903.pdf>.

From Politics to Professorship: The Memorable Life of Lord Ralf Dahrendorf (1929-2009)

By Warangkana Tempati, FNF Communications Manager

Politics and democracy were in the blood of Ralf Dahrendorf. The son of the former Social Democrat deputy leader, Lord Dahrendorf devoted his life to the defending and promoting of liberal democracy. As a German boy, he learned firsthand the cruelty of dictatorship. His father, who was then an MP, was arrested by the Nazis and sentenced to seven years of hard labour for participation in a failed plot against Hitler in October 1944.



Just weeks later, the 16-year-old Dahrendorf was arrested for writing and distributing anti-Nazi pamphlets and was put in the Buchenwald concentration camp. After his prison release in January 1945, he returned to school in his hometown, Hamburg, and eventually obtained a PhD in Social Science from Hamburg University.

Like his father, the young Dahrendorf joined Germany's Social Democratic Party on his 18th birthday. Later, he switched to the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and in 1969 was elected to the German Parliament. Soon, he was appointed junior foreign minister in Willy Brandt's first government. While serving as a European commissioner in the 70s, he observed with delight the negotiations for British entry into the Common Market.

In his article "Democracy under Pressure: The European Experience" published in 2001 in the 29th issue of the German Historical Institute, Dahrendorf said "Democracy, as I understand it, means three things: change is possible without violence; there are checks and balances to the exercise of power; and the people have a decisive say in the process."

Working as a professor and lecturer at several top-notch universities in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, Dahrendorf saw his academic reputation grow beyond borders and was offered the post of director at the London School of Economics (LSE). He became the first foreign director of LSE and acquired British citizenship in 1988. At this institution, the Dahrendorf scholarships, named in his honour, were created to give financial assistance to LSE students from developing countries. Years later, he accepted the appointment to the post of warden of St. Antony's College at the University of Oxford.

The well-known sociologist was once invited to speak at Thammasat University in Bangkok on topic of "From Civil Society to World Civil Society" when the institution celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2003.

Given his international reputation and the contribution he made to the academic world, it was no surprise that leading newspapers in Britain and several other countries published an article about him in their obituary sections. The Guardian's obituary, for example, described Lord Dahrendorf as "an academic who dipped into politics, and a political activist who never lost sight of the intellectual and moral framework that had to underpin the day-to-day management of democracy."

The Telegraph's obituary described him as "an authority on class divisions in modern society," referring to his internationally acclaimed books such as "Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society" (1959), "Social and Democracy in Germany" (1966), "The Modern Social Conflict" (1988).

Lord Dahrendorf passed away at the age of 80 on 17 June 2009 in Cologne, leaving behind him a legacy of democratic wisdom and scholarship.



FNF Sponsors Workshops on Self-Development for Cambodian Students

By FNF Cambodia Programme Manager Khim Sophanna

"Even though we have reached our goal, we can still lose it in one day if we have no morality and commitment to continue or maintain it," said a successful medical professional and guest speaker at the workshop "Self-Development for Changes" sponsored by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

"There are no failures, only learning experiences," said Ly Srey Vyna, a 40-year-old medical doctor and an elected MP from the Sam Rainsy Party. Born to a poor family, she was a diligent student and won a scholarship to study medicine in Poland for eight years. Returning to Cambodia, she opened three clinics and shared her life experiences with fellow Cambodians.

As a mother of five and a full-time career professional, she has to juggle between roles. Attributing her success to being optimistic, open-minded and responsible, she said only through education could people be changed. Of the three sources of education--parents, society and oneself—she believed self-education is the most important and effective way to succeed in life.

A total of 58 people attended the workshop on 6 June 2009 at Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh. The workshop was the result of the cooperation between the FNF and the Citizen Action Net for Social Development (CAN). Participants included teachers and students from various educational institutions and universities. The event was one among a number of liberal programmes that the FNF conducted with the aim of promoting self-reliance, which is a basic ingredient of liberal democracy.

CAN Secretary Kok Tha served as the facilitator for the one-day workshop. He began the day with a round of self-introduction by asking each participant to write down on a piece of paper a reflection of his or her personality, future goals and relevant experiences. After that the participants took turns reading out what they wrote and got to know each other.

Mrs. Ly Srey Vyna gave a speech about her achievement and how she worked to earn it. After that, FNF Cambodia Programme Assistant Neang Sovathana asked the participants to team up in groups and list reasons for their personal successes and failures. The idea behind this group assignment and later presentation is that everyone has personal lessons to share and everyone can learn from the others' real-life experiences.

Dr. Yang Saing Koma, CAN chairman, led a discussion on the 7 Habits of Highly Successful People. "We need to change our habit in order to become a different person with a different level of development," he said. Dr. Yang gave many examples of famous people who dared to change themselves, practiced these habits and became successful in the chosen fields.

Towards the end of the programme, the participants were asked to draft a list of things that they are willing and committed to do for personal development after leaving this workshop.

They also wrote down their impression of the workshop, including what they learned today. These papers would be used as feedback materials for improving future self-development workshops.



Korea: Democracy or Efficiency?

By FNF Korea Programme Director Walter Klitz

In the light of the planned reorganisation of local governments in South Korea which aims at increasing efficiency and overcoming antagonisms, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty invited a number of experts to a conference in an attempt to bring forward arguments that would strengthen local autonomy and civic participation.

The conference, titled “Local Autonomy and Administrative Territorial Reform,” was held in cooperation with the Centre for Local Autonomy of Hanyang University at the university’s Baeknam Information Center and Library in Seoul.

At the time being, various draft laws have been submitted to the Korean parliament. They range from a purely administrative reform that would abolish the three-tier structure of the administration, thus further strengthening the authority of the central government, to the introduction of a competitive federal system. The current Korean constitution of local government is as yet under the strong impact of the Japanese Colonial Period (1910-1945), which basically makes them decentralised subordinate bodies of the central administration. Hence, local communities are narrowly restricted in their legislative power over local issues.

In his statement, Walter Klitz, representative of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Korea, emphasized that every reorganisation of local government should be confronted with the question whether it strengthens or weakens local autonomy. Decentralised structures, according to Mr. Klitz, are part of a very sensitive system of checks and balances and consequently a constitutive element of a federal division of powers.

In her presentation, Ms. Sabine Mecking, professor at the Heinrich-Heine University in Düsseldorf, said that democracy and efficiency are by no means opposed one to the other but coexist, though not without tensions, requiring constant efforts to balance out efficiency and legitimacy. This, she said, has to be kept in mind when interfering with established structures of local autonomy.

Prof. Dr. Sang-Woo HAN, CLA director made welcoming remarks at the conference and Prof. Dr. Byeong-Moon JI from the Chonnam National University was also there to deliver a presentation on key issues in reorganising Korean local Governments.

The Korean contributors as well as the more than 120 participants of the conference seemed convinced that South Korean democracy has a good chance to move forward and that efforts to put the historical clock back can be checked.

REPORTS



Report: Thailand and Malaysia Remain on List of “Worst Places for Refugees”

By Warangkana Temapti, FNF Communications Manager

Thailand and Malaysia remain among the top rankings of countries with the worst refugee treatment, according to the latest report by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

Other “worst places for refugees,” include South Africa, Gaza, Kenya, Egypt and Turkey.

According to the report, “Malaysian immigration officials continued to sell deportees to gangs that operate along the Malaysia-Thailand border. The gang members extort bribes from the deportees in exchange for smuggling them back into Malaysia and sell those who cannot pay into slavery. Men frequently end up on Thai fishing boats, women in brothels, and children with gangs who exploit child beggars.”

It also says that “when Thailand’s navy intercepted boats carrying a reported 992 Myanmar Rohingya in December, they detained the already weak and hungry refugees and reportedly kicked and beat them. They

then forced them back onto their unseaworthy boats, towed them out to sea, and abandoned them without engines and scant food or water.”

The report “World Refugee Survey 2009” provides country-by-country grading of refugee treatment in four areas: 1) refoulement/physical protection, 2) detention/access to courts, 3) freedom of movement and residence, and 4) the right to earn a livelihood.

Countries under the survey were given a grade ranging from A to F for each area. Both Thailand and Malaysia received the same grades that they received last year. Thailand received ‘F’ in three areas except for “the right to earn a livelihood” which it received a ‘D’. Malaysia got an ‘F’ in three areas except in “the freedom of movement and residence” which it received a ‘D’.

USCRI is campaigning against the worldwide practice of warehousing refugees, and is inviting members of the general public to sign their signatures in support of the campaign. The NGO believes that keeping refugees in camps for years after years benefits neither the host country nor the refugees. For the host countries as well as the donor countries, the cost of providing aid is indefinite. For the refugees, it is the crushing of fundamental human rights to which they have no where to escape. Living in a refugee camp, they are subject to poor living conditions, substandard healthcare and sanitation, lack of educational opportunities and restriction of movement.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugee, worldwide there are 42 million people who have been forcibly uprooted by conflict and persecution.

In Thailand, many Burmese refugees have been kept in camps for as long as 24 years. In Malaysia, the longest staying refugees are Filipinos who have lived in camps for 35 years. Gaza, West Bank and Lebanon have kept refugees in camps for as long as 60 years.

“It’s a generation lost,” said Dr. Veerawit Tianchainan, head of USCRI Thailand. Commenting on the photo of weary Rohingya on the cover of the report, he said “You couldn’t imagine anything worse than being thrown into a disabled engine boat when you are seeking asylum.”

However, Dr. Veerawit said there was a glimpse of hope for refugees in Thailand. The Thai government is considering a proposal to allow refugees who meet certain criteria to work and earn a living. His organisation is also seeking permission to visit refugee camps.

“Burmese refugees living in nine camps along the border are our priority,” he said. There are well over 100,000 Burmese refugees in Thailand and at least 100,000 more working illegally in the country.

In Brazil, refugees are eligible for the same work permits as nationals and can live and travel within the country as they wish. They also have equal access to government-funded assistance programmes. The country is ranked among the “best places for refugees” along with Ecuador and Costa Rica where refugees are allowed to work and free to travel within the country.

At the launch of the report in Bangkok on 19 June, USCRI Thailand introduced to the press an actress who volunteered to serve as its first Thai ambassador for its refugee rights campaign. Ms. Diana Jongjintanakarn admitted at the press conference that she had no idea who the refugees were and why they were in Thailand until the USCRI approached her.

“Too many people are caught up in their own things,” said Ms. Diana. “I have no idea that while I’m shopping or maxing out my credit card, some people somewhere are waiting for opportunities that never seem to come.”

“Or when I complain about my stomach sticking out or that I don’t have the right colour of lipstick to wear, there are people out there who are waiting for a miracle to happen...who are waiting to be given a chance,” the 28-year-old actress said.

The Hong Kong-born soap opera star appeared realistic about her first unpaid NGO job. “We may not be able to change their lives in a big way, but I’m sure we can make a difference,” she said.

The press conference was held at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand one day ahead of the World Refugee Day.

To support the anti-warehousing campaign or obtain a copy of the report, please visit www.refugees.org.

Report: Refugees and Asylum Seekers Total 42 Million Worldwide

The number of people forcibly uprooted by conflict and persecution worldwide stood at 42 million at the end of last year amid a sharp slowdown in repatriation and more prolonged conflicts resulting in protracted displacement, a UN agency says.



The total includes 16 million refugees and asylum seekers and 26 million internally displaced people uprooted within their own countries, according to the annual report "Global Trends" released by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugee (UNHCR) on 16 June 2009.

The new report says 80 percent of the world's refugees are in developing nations, as are the vast majority of internally displaced people--a population with whom the UN refugee agency is increasingly involved. Many have been uprooted for years with no end in sight.

Although the overall total of 42 million uprooted people at year's end represents a drop of about 700,000 over the previous year, new displacement in 2009--not reflected in the annual report--has already more than offset the decline.

"In 2009, we have already seen substantial new displacements, namely in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia," UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres said. "While some displacements may be short-lived, others can take years and even decades to resolve. We continue to face several longer-term internal displacement situations in places like Colombia, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Each of these conflicts has also generated refugees who flee beyond their own borders."

The report counts 29 different groups of 25,000 or more refugees in 22 nations who have been in exile for five years or longer and for whom there are no immediate solutions in sight. This means at least 5.7 million refugees are living in limbo.

About 2 million refugees and internally displaced people (IDP) were able to return home in 2008, a decline from the year before. Refugee repatriation (604,000) was down 17 percent, while IDP returns (1.4 million) dropped by 34 percent. Traditionally the largest durable solution for refugees, it was the second-lowest repatriation total in 15 years. The decline in part reflects deteriorating security conditions, namely in Afghanistan and Sudan.

"This is an indication that the large-scale repatriation movements observed in the past have decelerated," the report says, noting that an estimated 11 million refugees have returned home over the past 10 years--most of them with UNHCR assistance.

UNHCR proposed 121,000 individuals for resettlement to third countries in 2008 and more than 67,000 departed to their new homelands with the agency's help.

Of the global total of uprooted people, UNHCR cares for 25 million, including a record 14.4 million IDPs--up from 13.7 million in 2007--and 10.5 million refugees. The other 4.7 million refugees are Palestinians under the UN Relief and Works Agency.

In recent years, UNHCR has increasingly been tasked under the UN's humanitarian reform process with providing help to the internally displaced, in addition to its traditional mandate of protecting and assisting refugees who have crossed international borders. Since 2005, the agency has seen the number of IDPs it cares for more than double.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the global total of IDPs has stood at about 26 million for the past two years. No single agency has responsibility for all of them, but the UN has introduced a "cluster approach" in which individual organisations are assigned roles in displacement situations based on their expertise. For UNHCR, that means coordination of protection, camp management and shelter.

"Being forced from your home by conflict or persecution is a tragedy whether you've crossed an international border or not," Guterres said. "Today, we are seeing a relentless series of internal conflicts that are generating millions of uprooted people. UNHCR is committed to working within the UN team and the broader

humanitarian community to provide the internally displaced with the help they need, just as we do for refugees."

Colombia has one of the world's largest internally displaced populations, with estimates of some 3 million. Iraq had some 2.6 million internally displaced at the end of 2008—with 1.4 million of them displaced in the past three years alone. There were more than 2 million IDPs in Sudan's Darfur region. Renewed armed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Somalia last year brought total displacement in each to 1.5 million and 1.3 million respectively. Kenya saw extensive new internal displacement early in the year, while armed conflict in Georgia forced another 135,000 people from their homes. Other increases in displacement in 2008 were in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Yemen.

The refugee population under UNHCR's mandate last year dropped for the first time since 2006 because of voluntary repatriation and because of the downward revision in estimates of refugees and people in "refugee-like situations" from Iraq and Colombia. The 2008 refugee figure was 10.5 million, down from 11.4 million in 2007. But the number of asylum seekers making individual claims rose for a second year, to 839,000—up 28 percent. South Africa (207,000) was the largest single recipient of individual claims, followed by the United States (49,600—UNHCR estimate), France (35,400) and Sudan (35,100).

Developing countries hosted 80 percent of all refugees, underscoring the disproportionate burden carried by those least able to afford it as well as the need for international support. Major refugee-hosting countries in 2008 included Pakistan (1.8 million); Syria (1.1 million); Iran (980,000); Germany (582,700), Jordan (500,400); Chad (330,500); Tanzania (321,900); and Kenya (320,600). Major countries of origin included Afghanistan (2.8 million) and Iraq (1.9 million), which together account for 45 percent of all refugees under UNHCR's responsibility. Other countries of origin included Somalia (561,000); Sudan (419,000); Colombia, including people in refugee-like situations (374,000), and D.R. Congo (368,000).

To read the 21-page report "2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons," go to <http://www.unhcr.org/4a375c426.html>


UPCOMING EVENT: EFN Conference 2009

The Economic Freedom Network (EFN) Asia will convene its tenth international conference in Seam Reap, Cambodia on 8-10 October 2009. This year's main topic is "Overcoming the Global Financial and Economic Crisis: The Rule of Law and the Key to Economic Freedom".

The conference will explore how to bridge the gap between people's clamour for action and protection against the effects of the crisis can be reconciled to sober economic analysis. The event will serve as a platform for the exchange of useful information, practical techniques and networking tailored to the needs of think tanks, industry, academics and policymakers.

All is welcome to join. Registration deadline is 8 August. For registration and enquiries, please contact Dr. Gorawut Numnak at gorawut.numnak@fnst.org. For more information, please visit www.efnasia.org.

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**Friedrich Naumann Foundation
 Southeast and East Asia office**
 No. 29 BBC Tower, 25th Floor, Sukhumvit 63 Road,
 Bangkok 10110 Thailand e-mail: contact@fnst.org

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