

# Human Security of Karen Refugees in Thailand

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## Abstract

*This article examines human security conditions of Karen refugees in the Thai-Burma border using the seven pillars of human security defined in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report as its conceptual framework. It focuses on one of the smallest camps along the border, Ban Dong Yang (BDY). A brief historical background describes how BDY camp originated, the geographical challenges BDY residents face, and how this affects Karen refugees' human security. Detailed empirical data collected in 2013-4 presents evidence on how BDY residents have coped with limited environments and resources through interactions with external service providers, and how they have developed their agency over the years. We conclude that international funds for Burma should be invested in community-based education across the Thai-Burma border, especially upper-level tertiary education, as the solution for helping this vulnerable migrant group escape from dire human security conditions.*

## Keywords

*Karen; refugees; human security; UNDP; Burma*

*Karen refugees are birds inside a cage that get fed on a regular basis but are not able to fly... Many do not even know what it means to fly.*

(Fuertes, 2010)

*When NGOs come, they come with their own agendas whether it's religion, human rights, education, gender-based violence, or psycho-social plays. We have very limited access. We need to receive whatever we can.*

(Former Karen refugee working in Thailand)

## Introduction

Mobility gives freedom for human beings. However, it is not a human right. Article 13 of the 1948 Universal Declaration for Human Rights defines only half of this right to mobility: a right to leave and return to your own country of origin but not a right to arrive and reside in another country (United Nations, 1948). This situation creates 'floating' people—refugees, internally displaced or undocumented migrants—who are not protected within the host countries' legal realms. Human rights cannot solve this fundamental problem as it clashes with state sovereignty; humanitarianism attempts to address displaced persons' needs, but each donor institution has its own agendas and priorities. When mobility is restricted and

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many human beings are confined in one area for long, multiple security issues arise for both the states concerned and the affected people.

The conflict between the Burmese military regime and ethnic minorities in Burma<sup>2</sup> have pushed millions of refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) into ill-defined territory for the past decades, due to continued armed conflict between Karen rebels and the Burmese military. The presence of armed groups and the uncertainty of maintaining any ceasefire poses a continued threat to Karen people and their community security.

Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and holds no international legal obligations to protect refugees, and so it is the international community that has provided various goods and services for Karen refugee camps. For the past three decades, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been the main body that helps these refugees return home voluntarily, integrate locally or resettle in third countries. From 2005 to 2014, over 96,000 mixed ethnic groups of refugees from Burma have resettled in 13 countries, mostly in North Europe, North America and Oceania (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011; The Border Consortium (TBC), 2014b). Group resettlements have ended. Only small-scale resettlements are arranged for family reunions and other humanitarian concerns.<sup>3</sup>

This paper argues that human security offers a better framework to approach refugee issues, and to understand why refugees seek to move to places where human security is better guaranteed, than the current human rights argument that is dominant among the international community. Human security is employed as a conceptual framework, a better and more encompassing conceptual framework than that of human rights when it comes to asylum seeking. The former offers a complex, dynamic and ecological view to understanding refugees' needs for their survival and subsistence. Better human rights are not a necessary condition for people to move; increased human security is. Security can offer a more favorable environment for the protection of human rights. Without human security (including permanent ceasefires, regional autonomy and human resources), human rights-minded democratic leaders have nowhere to return to. Until then, Karen refugees may claim their human, not legal, right to remain in Thailand.

The objectives of this article, therefore, are to highlight the current human security situation of Karen refugees on the Thai-Burma border and to discuss appropriate measures by state- and non-state actors to alleviate the vulnerable conditions faced there. The threats that refugees face are multi-dimensional, ranging from the lack of access to basic food and healthcare, to broader freedoms like the right to political representation. To illustrate this point, the author uses Ban Don Yang (BDY) Camp in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand, as a case study.

The paper begins with a discussion of the seven pillars of human security, defined in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, as the study's conceptual framework, and compares them with international human rights (UNDP, 1994a). We then describe the methods used to collect empirical data for the study and give a brief historical background of how BDY camp originated, the geographical challenges BDY residents face, and how this affects Karen refugees' human security. The article moves on to present findings on how

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2. Burma is used rather than Myanmar to reflect usage prevalent among the refugees themselves.

3 Information from key informant interviews, 2014.

BDY residents have coped with the limited environments and resources through interactions with external service providers, and developed their agency over the years. It concludes with proposed solutions for helping this vulnerable migrant group escape from their current situation, given the unsettled political situation in both countries.

## Human Security of Karen Refugees

The 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), offers a multi-faceted approach to examine human needs, safe migration and development from an agent-based perspective. It lays out two broad categories of human security: 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' (Florini & Simmons, 1998; UNDP, 1994a), arguing that 'human security is not a concern with weapons—it is a concern with human life and dignity' (p. 22), best insured through prevention and people-centered approaches. The report details seven components of human security: personal, community, political, economic, food, energy and environment securities that are interdependent with one another. The 1994 UNDP definition and seven pillars of human security is the most comprehensive and encompassing framework among all other interpretations of human security.

Since the 1994 UNDP's definition, notions of personal, cultural or environmental security have emerged and the reconceptualization of security has been carried out by International Relations (IR) theorists (Baldwin, 1997; Booth, 1991; Jones, 1995; Krause & Williams, 1997; Matthews, 1989; Poku & Graham, 1998; Thomas, 1987; Wæver, 1995; Wiberg, 1992). Human security has been revisited for further investigation for its utility and its relation to other global political concerns (Bellamy & McDonald, 2002; Evans, 2001; Kerr, Tow & Hanson, 2003; King & Murray, 2001). Some have a narrow definition of human security as 'vulnerability to physical violence during conflict' (Lodgaard, 2000) while others share a broader concept, linking it with other areas such as development or globalization (Sen, 1999, 1992), which is often represented as the Canadian vs. Japanese conceptions of human security (Bernard, 2006). Ernst Haas (1983) long argued that the security literature needs to learn from the 'evolutionary epistemology' of global life. For many in East Asia, economic, food, energy and environmental issues are real and immediate threats to their peoples' survival and resilience.

Many have tried the broader human security concept in migration studies. Elspeth Guild and Joanne van Selm (2005) re-conceptualize security as 'political and legal security', 'cultural and identity security' and 'personal and economic security' in their study on the impact of immigrants on hosting countries. Literature on the migration-development nexus (Newland, 2003), migration-development-security (Tirtosudarmo, 2005), and migration-globalization-human security (Graham & Poku, 2000) employ people-centered security concepts. Dewi F. Anwar (2005) has tried to weave the ideas of human rights, security and irregular migration. In particular, she identified new threats to human security as exploitation of irregular workers, the growing incidence of people smuggling and human trafficking. However, Anwar did not concretize the contents of human security and used the term with 'non-traditional' security interchangeably, which makes the concept left very vague. With further embodiment and comparison with established international human rights norms, the UNDP's human security lens can provide an alternative agent-based analysis for the motivations of migrants, vulnerability they face as well as potential or imagined threats they pose to hosting societies.

Similar studies on human security have been conducted on Palestine refugees. While the United Nations Relief and Works Agency on Palestine Refugees in the Near East offers a wide range of resources on the subject from emergency appeals and health reports, academic articles include Sari Hanafi's camp governance (Hanafi & Long, 2010; Misselwitz & Hanafi, 2009); Taylor Long's human (in)security (Long & Hanafi 2010), Karin Seyfert's food security (Ghattas, Seyfert, & Sahyoun, 2012), Jason Hart's children's participation (2008), and Asem Khalil's rights-based approach (2011). Long and Hanafi's (2010) over 20 hours of in-depth interviews on the Palestinian perceptions of both Lebanese and Palestinian security institutions find that the conventional state-centric approaches to security have not been sufficient and conclude that the improvement of Palestinian human security will yield tangible security benefits for Lebanese and Palestinians alike.

Human security has been the main driving push and pull factor for irregular migration (Song, 2014). What is worse is, because of the migrants' irregular status, their human security came into greater danger, which creates a vicious circle. Unless this vicious circle is broken by urgent extra-legal measures by the concerned states, both vulnerable migrants and hosting societies can end up being in highly insecure situations.

Table 1 below conceptually dismantles the seven pillars—namely personal, community, political, economic, food health and environment securities—and shows how similar the contents of human rights and human security are. Human security is securitization of human rights with the sense of urgency and paramount importance attached to affected people, regardless of their legal status, that requires extra-legal and extra-political measures by the concerned states.

There are areas that the 1951 Refugee Convention does not cover, in terms of basic income, the preservation of ethnic identities, freedom from manmade disasters and political representation. All of the human security criteria listed above are highly relevant to one's agency and self-organization to sustain life through security and subsistence. The full realization of refugees' agency is limited, given their confined geopolitical environments. However, refugees themselves, with the help from external service providers, have been developing survival skills through active communication and interactions with the outside world. The following sections elaborate upon each human security dimension and how refugees have coped with these challenges.

## Methods

Ban Don Yang is the smallest among the nine Karen camps along the Thai-Burma border, hosting 3,300 adult and child refugees as of June 2014. The rationale for choosing this camp is its remoteness and size. BDY is located at the margin where only essential programs such as the distribution of food and medicines are provided but other educational programs are not. This makes the camp a good target sample to study how and why certain external service provisions have been prioritized.

**Table 1: Human Rights and Human Security**

Human Rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention	Human rights conventions	Seven Pillars of Human Security under 1994 UNDP		Indicators
The right to freedom of religion (Article 4); The right to be issued identity and travel documents (Articles 27 and 28); The right not to be punished for illegal entry (Article 31); The right not to be expelled, except under strictly defined conditions (Article 32); The right to access the courts (Article 16); The right to freedom of movement within the territory (Article 26); The right to education (Article 22)	UDHR Articles 1-19, 26; ICCPR Articles 2-3, 6-20, 23-4, 26; ICESCR Articles 2-3, 10, 13-4; CEDAW; CRC; CAT; and other ILO conventions no forced labor or child labor	Personal Security	Identity Privacy Gender equality Gender-based violence Free from violence, arbitrary arrest/detention, enforced disappearance, torture, slavery	Stateless people (UNHCR registered) Gender Development Index Homicide rate Human trafficking Slavery Index Forced disappearance, tortured or SGBV victims
	UDHR Article 27; ICCPR Article 27; ICESCR Article 15; CERD; and MWC	Community Security	Preservation of cultural heritage Free from discrimination, based on ethnicity, nationality, social origin or religion	Inequality Index
	UDHR Articles 2, 20-21; ICCPR Articles 21-22, 25	Political Security	Self-determination Free and fair election and representation Freedom of association	
The right to work (Articles 17 to 19)	UDHR Article 22-4; ICESCR Articles 6-9; and other ILO conventions on minimum wage, etc.)	Economic Security	Access to basic income	GDP per capita GNI Income GINI coefficient Labor force participation
	ICESCR Articles 11	Food Security	Access to basic food	People living under the poverty line Malnutrition rate
	UDHR Article 25; ICESCR Articles 12	Health Security	Access to basic physical and mental healthcare	Children under-five stunted Life expectancy Maternal mortality ratio Under-five mortality rate Expenditure on health (% of GDP)
The right to housing (Article 21); The right to public relief and assistance (Article 23)	ICESCR Articles 11	Environmental Security	Clean water and sanitation Free from man-made disasters	Carbon dioxide emissions per capita Change in forest area

ICCPR=International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; ICESCR=International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; CRC= Convention of the Rights of the Child; CEDAW=Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; CERD=International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; CAT=Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; MWC=International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

Empirical data was collected from the camp in May 2013 and December 2014, respectively. The fieldwork included:

- 1) In-depth individual and small group interviews with humanitarian workers, UNHCR field officers, Thai officials, academics and camp leaders<sup>4</sup>, some of whom were followed up through further email correspondence;
- 2) Two sets of a focus group discussion and writing workshop with 26 refugee youth between age 15 and 26. These were held at the post-secondary program at the camp called the Blessing Further Studies Programme (BFSP);
- 3) A small-scale survey of these 26 refugee youth (15 female and 11 male) at the BFSP;
- 4) Secondary literature from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UNHCR, including information about human security conditions in the camp. This data was analyzed, as well as verified against, the primary sources.

The rationale for conducting focus group discussions with the refugee youth themselves, in addition to the in-depth interviews of key informants, is to discover more about the needs of those most directly affected by any changes in external funding. Each session of the focus group discussions lasted three hours. Issues discussed were their preferred next destinations, professions they want to pursue, places where these jobs are available, skills and qualifications they would need for the professions and the availability of these skill training and education in the camp.

## **Ban Dong Yang: the smallest Karen refugee camp in the Thai-Burma border**

The first refugee settlement in Thailand was established in Tak Province in 1984. Although the Thai government is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it allowed the Karen to set up temporary settlements so long as international NGOs provided the assistance (Burma Link, 2015). According to the UNHCR, as of January 2014 Thailand officially hosts a total of 136,499 refugees, 4,712 asylum seekers and 506,197 stateless persons, including the Karen. On the Thai-Burma border alone, in June 2014 there were 75,463 registered refugees in the various camps and 119,461 documented by The Border Consortium (TBC). TBC figures are based on rations given to both registered refugees and unregistered Burmese citizens or Thai residents.

As Figure 1 shows, BDY Camp is located at the edge of the western Thai-Burma border. Ban Don Yang means 'rubber tree village' in Thai. The camp was formed in 1997 with the merger of the Thu Ka and Hti Ta Baw camps. It is one of the smallest camps which accommodates approximately 3,300 mostly Karen refugees, as of June 2014 (TBC, 2014b). The UNHCR started the registration of the camp's residents as refugees in 2004, and TBC has handled the distribution of basic provisions since 2007. Thai authorities guard the comings and goings of camp residents at the check-point. Inside the camp, Thai-Karen and Thai-Mon security guards monitor people's movements. Its remote geographical location, the challenging access and smaller population size present distinct challenges to the camp residents as well as to service providers.

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<sup>4</sup> Respondent list is available from the author upon request.

**Figure 1:** Karen Refugee Camps at the Thai-Burma Border

Source: Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity

Given its isolated location, there are fewer IOs and NGOs active in BDY compared to larger camps like Mae La, which hosts over 20,000 refugees.

## Assessment of Human Security in BDY

### *Personal Security*

Personal security is assessed in terms of refugees' freedom of movement, the risk of violence, and personal justice. Refugees have no freedom to go outside the camp in Thailand. Their basic rights and personal security are not guaranteed outside the temporary shelters that have been their only home for almost three decades now. They are exposed to arbitrary search whenever there are national security and public order issues, which makes them vulnerable to personal or family insecurity. Thai authorities, for example, once went into the camp, arbitrarily searched homes and took photos of refugees in the camp when armed men

attacked the Three Pagodas Pass, 15 km away from BDY. This was because family members of the suspected Karen National Liberation Army were staying in the camp.<sup>5</sup>

Internally, the in-camp justice mechanism relies on traditional personal mediations, arranged by senior members. On both visits to BDY, the author was told that there had been a few cases of domestic violence where drunken husbands used physical violence against their wives. The camp committee members called the husband and the wife and ordered the former to offer an apology to the latter. Other crimes, such as drug and alcohol abuse and rape, including that of minors, have also been documented by the Karen Women's Organization (KWO); sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) also occurs but often goes unreported (KWO, 2007).

The absence of a modern justice system and rule of law may be pointed out as the source of the problems. There are no lawyers, prosecutors or judges in the camp although there are physical spaces in which to detain people. Conflicting laws between the Karen and the Thai or with international standards is another point of contention. Teenage marriage is statutory rape under Thai law but not under Karen law, for example (Jackson, 2012).

There are internal mechanisms and camp regulations that the Karen Refugee Committee applies to all Karen-led camps, including BDY. These rules are meant to deal with minor infractions and carry penalties ranging from education and warnings to fines and confinement in camp. Some camps enforce curfews to prevent crime (Vogler, 2006). For more serious crimes, or for crimes in which the victim/survivor so requests, the Thai justice system is accessed. UNHCR is responsible for facilitating access of camp residents to the Thai justice system.<sup>6</sup> In order to protect SGBV victims, the camp committee has the sub-committee on SGBV where victims can go and seek help (Freccero & Seelinger, 2013).

The focus group discussion participants revealed that it is peer pressure, coupled with Christian values, high moral standards and the closed but communal environments, that prevents further serious crime from happening. Refugees look after their own neighbors and friends and so become each other's watchdog. Neighbors have close proximity with one another and any violence or abuse would be spotted by and reported to section leaders immediately, which creates a feedback mechanism inside the camp. The Karen Refugee Committee has its own Code of Conduct and the fourth principle is confidentiality.<sup>7</sup> The abuse of drugs and alcohol was pointed out as a potential cause of crime by a couple of focus group participants.

### *Community Security*

Like their inherent personal insecurity, the Karen refugees' community security is severely damaged by Burma's internal conflicts and has still not yet recovered. The Thai government policies have been directed towards stopping the spillover of refugees into Thai villages and the further influx of irregular migrants, both of which have become major issues between Thailand and its neighboring countries in recent years. Random searches and headcounts, as well as lingering fear of deportation, are disruptive to the cohesion of the community and hinder the community from pursuing its own interests and ethnic identities.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with former BDY refugee.

<sup>6</sup> Email interview with UNHCR field officer.

<sup>7</sup> Document reviewed by the author.



Inside the camp, the refugees' community security is better protected than their fellow Karens who remain in Burma. BDY residents are 95% Karen (Burma Link, 2013). They practice their religions and engage in community and cultural activities. There are ten churches in the camp, as of December 2014 (when the author visited on 23 December 2014, ten churches were planning their own Christmas events, separately), and two Buddhist temples that allow the refugees to worship. They receive funds for special cultural and religious functions/festivals (Jackson, 2012).

### *Political Security*

Political security can only be guaranteed with proper recognition, representation and political participation. Having been forced out of Burma by the military and confined within the camps by the Thai government, refugees are severely limited in their ability to freely associate, assemble, and express themselves. BDY residents who are not registered under the UNHCR cannot vote in camp committee elections or stand for higher positions within camp committees (Jackson, 2012; TBC, 2014b).

What little political representation the refugees have comes through the camp and the refugee committees. The Camp Committee coordinates the camp's daily operations, the delivery of services and the communication between the camp and external organizations like NGOs and the UNHCR (Jackson, 2012), whereas the Refugee Committee is organized along ethnic lines and represent each ethnic group. The Refugee Committee, therefore, is more politically representative than the Camp Committee. For example, the two main refugee committees along the Thai-Burma border are the Karen Refugee Committee and Karenni Refugee Committee (TBC, 2014b). Despite the fact that the committee members are not directly elected through democratic means but by a college of electors, these individuals have high rates of public approval. All refugees surveyed in BDY rated their Camp Committee 'Good' or 'Very Good' (Jackson, 2012).

The Camp Committee's political autonomy in Thailand is inherently limited. It cannot, for example, source funding or rations for the camp or control the camp population's entry and departure, as that is entirely up to the Thai authorities. The camp leadership does have some control over the decisions on who can come and visit the camp. Internally, camp and section leaders perceive their responsibilities as maintaining the order and security of the camp, solving conflicts within and between households, dealing with drunkenness and adultery, reporting major crimes to higher authorities, helping sick residents get to the hospital or overseeing community work (Jackson, 2012). The Karen Refugee Committee, on the other hand, has more political clout than the Camp Committees to negotiate certain matters with the Thai and Burmese governments. There are measures to guarantee female representation by having a minimum quota of 33% for women in the camp management (Jackson, 2012).

### *Economic Security*

Refugees are not allowed to work outside the camp officially. However, in reality, many find jobs and work illegally in Thailand. They have no job or economic security as these jobs do not offer any stable income to sustain adequate standards of living (Lee, 2014), which is the biggest problem for refugees' self-esteem and self-reliance. Various NGOs offer vocational trainings to prepare refugees to be more employable when they eventually leave the camp. With the number of students enrolled in each cohort as a feedback mechanism, NGOs continue revising existing programs and introducing new ones. These vocational courses are more popular among the refugee youth than higher education. At first, courses taught trade skills such as sewing, hair-dressing, and engine repair as well as how to handle electricity. Later, courses on cooking, concrete flooring, bamboo growing, service, entrepreneurship and computer skills were added. There are 14 NGOs planning the provision of the skill sets, based on the region's economic development plans. Given the context of Burma having a booming construction industry, concrete flooring and electricity courses were introduced.

While the above programs prepare refugees for future employment, some generate real income. TBC's Community Agriculture Programme (CAP) includes renting land to establish community gardens outside the camp and the formation of cluster groups of farmers, trained in sustainable farming and seed saving. This generates income and savings for the purchase of food and other essential household items not provided by NGOs. Livestock growing, fish rearing and food processing do also contribute positively to increasing the income and economic security of refugees.

More educated refugees with English skills work for NGOs or community-based organizations (CBOs), and those enrolled in the junior college program in the camp want to gain similar job opportunities in future. This, however, creates a 'brain drain' issue. Those who speak good English are often hired by NGOs; once they are exposed to the outside world, they often leave the camp and never come back. Those left behind become, in contrast, more isolated and marginalized. During the author's research over two years, she witnessed the school principal of the post-secondary education program and his wife leave for the United States. The most qualified teacher also left the camp and now lives outside it, working for an NGO. Subsequently the school lost external funding and closed down in March 2015.

### *Food Security*

Basic food is provided by external aid and, in this regard, refugees do have access to food security. In 2011, BDY had the highest percentage of 'acceptable' diets (88.1%) and the lowest Coping Strategies Index (CSI) among all camps (Caldwell & Ravesloot, 2011). The CSI measures 'behavior changes in households when access to adequate or *preferred* food is difficult (emphasis added)'. Recently, however, around 18% of households claim to experience moderate to severe hunger, and 45% of children experience global chronic malnutrition, a figure higher than Burma's (TBC, 2014a). This can be attributed primarily to the reduction in food rations. In 2011-3, rations of rice and oil were reduced (Committee for the Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) & UNHCR, 2013). Rations provide a limited range of food items that cannot meet the requirements for nutritionally adequate diets. There are not many alternative food sources in the camp. In 2011, only 7% raise poultry, 7% farm fish and 14% cultivate homestead gardens (Caldwell & Ravesloot, 2011).

The full realization of food security is not just about the quantity of food available to refugees in the camp but the ability to self-determine their own access to preferred and varied sources of food--not food that someone rations out to you, but your own means to acquire what you need when you need it. Refugees do receive a stable provision of food rations; however, they rely on external donors and lack not just adequate nutrition but also autonomy over their own survival and subsistence. Under TBC's Community-Managed Targeting (CMT) scheme, for example, none of the BDY residents were categorized as 'self-reliant' (TBC, 2014b).

The CAP, by far the most successful program in terms of generating real income for refugees' economic security and building competence and autonomy for their personal, food and health security, helps establish community self-reliance in nutrition. To reduce child malnutrition, the nursery school lunch and the 'Healthy Babies, Bright Futures' initiatives, targeting pregnant women and children between 6-24 months, were also implemented (TBC, 2014b). These measures are considered very successful among the refugees themselves. Among 26 refugees who took part in focus group discussions with the author in December 2014, the CAP was ranked highest whereas the post-secondary program was ranked lowest.<sup>8</sup>

### *Health Security*

Basic healthcare is funded and provided by the UNHCR, the American Refugee Committee (ARC) and other NGOs. Given their refugee status, however, the residents of BDY do not enjoy healthcare benefits that provide prolonged care and expensive treatments (Mitschke, Mitschke, Slater & Teboh, 2011). Some of the biggest health problems are mental stress, infectious diseases (e.g. malaria) and chronic conditions (e.g. high blood pressure) (Carrara et al, 2006). Newly arrived refugees are susceptible to drug-resistant strains of malaria, respiratory infections and dengue fever. The prevalence of chronic malnutrition among children aged 6-59 months was also identified as a worrying trend (Mitschke et al., 2011).

### *Environmental Security*

Refugees enjoy primitive sanitary conditions and limited access to clean water in the camp (Jackson, 2012). NGOs train refugees to maintain sanitation and a safe water supply. All toilets in BDY use septic tanks and all water is obtained from either stand posts or piped water (Caldwell & Ravesloot, 2011).

However, BDY residents are not free to develop their own more sustainable and healthy physical environments or to protect themselves from man-made environmental disasters. Refugees are not allowed to use permanent building materials in the camp and the wooden huts provided by the UNHCR are vulnerable to fire, flood or landslides. Because of the camp's location in the mountains, flooding is not a big issue although heavy rain, which renders access to the camp difficult, is a serious concern for service providers.

Fire has been identified as the major threat to environmental security in the camps along the Thai-Burma border (Caldwell & Ravesloot, 2011). The camp is in a remote area that is prone

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<sup>8</sup> Interviews with eight BDY camp committee members on 23 December 2014. The average rate for the success of the community gardens, supported by TBC was 8.5 out of 10.

to wildfires, particularly in the dry season. Indeed, there had been a minor fire incident when the author visited BDY in December 2014. Several houses were burnt but no one was injured. In 2013, a fire in Mae La camp resulted in over 120 houses being destroyed (Burma Link, 2013) while another in Umphiem Mai camp killed 36 refugees.

There were also concerns about deforestation and the endangerment of flora and fauna in the forests near the camp by the refugees themselves (Jackson, 2012). Refugees venture into the forests to hunt and gather to supplement their diets and income, damaging local ecology and biodiversity. Refugees collect wild vegetables and firewood (Caldwell & Raveslout, 2011). The Community-Based Natural Resource Management project was initiated by TBC, and this has brought 'tangible results not only in terms of environmental protection but also in minimizing conflict with host communities in a protracted refugee situation' (TBC, 2014b).

### Summary

As presented in this analysis, the Karen refugees in BDY are weakest in their political, economic and environment security. Although far from perfect, basic personal, food and health securities are guaranteed by the interactions and feedback loops created among the camp leadership, IOs and NGOs as well as the Thai government. Community security is well protected and preserved for the Karen who make up 94-5% of the camp.

The choices given to the refugees, i.e. 1) return to Burma, 2) social integration in Thailand, and 3) resettlement in a third country, have different implications for human security. The human security situation for Burma, Thailand and the United States are estimated in Table 2 and Table 3 based on various indicators from the UNDP (2014b), Freedom House Freedom Index (2014), the United States Department of State Human Trafficking Reports (2014), and Global Slavery Index (2014), as well as the research described above. For the resettlement option, the US is chosen to represent the Western countries Karen refugees migrate to with UNHCR assistance. The UNDP ranks countries' Human Development Index (HDI) and calculates Burma, Thailand and the US are, respectively, the 150<sup>th</sup>, the 89<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup>, out of 187 countries measured in 2013. Freedom House identifies Burma as not free, Thailand partly free and the US free. The U.S. State Department Trafficking in Person Report classifies Burma as Tier 2 Watch List, Thailand Tier 3, and the US Tier 1 (a Tier 1 ranking indicates that a government has acknowledged the existence of human trafficking, made efforts to address the problem, and complies with minimum standards). Finally, the Global Slavery Index ranks Myanmar at the 61<sup>st</sup>, Thailand at the 44<sup>th</sup>, and the US at the 145<sup>th</sup>.

**Table 2:** Human Security Indicators in Burma, Thailand and the United States

Country	UNDP (187 countries in total)	Freedom House (213 countries and territories)	U.S. Trafficking Reports (187)	Global Slavery Index (167)
Burma	150 <sup>th</sup>	Not free	Tier 2 Watchlist	61 <sup>st</sup>
Thailand	89 <sup>th</sup>	Partly free	Tier 3	44 <sup>th</sup>
US	5 <sup>th</sup>	Free	Tier 1	145 <sup>th</sup>

**Table 3:** Human Security of Karen Refugees

	Personal	Community	Political	Economic	Food	Health	Environment	7
BDY								2.5
Burma*								1
Thailand**								5
US***								6.5

Secure (1); Medium (0.5); Insecure (0)

\* As of December 2014

\*\*Formal residence in Thailand outside the camp

\*\*\*Through the Refugee Resettlement Program. Refugees have no full voting rights or a right to stand for elections until they become permanent residents or citizens.

What is not effectively included in the current state of human security is education. Adult literacy, enrolments, the expected years of schooling, expenditure on education (% of GDP), and the percentage of primary school teachers trained to teach are all important indicators for human development, but not factors directly threatening human security. Given the precariousness of political, economic and environmental security for Karen refugees, education is an important consideration in forecasting the prospect of human security in the future. The final section examines the current state of the post-secondary school at BDY as an indicator of future human security for Karen refugees in Thailand.

### *Community-Based Education for Human Security*

The Blessing Further Studies Programme (BFSP) is the only post-secondary school in BDY; it had 26 enrolled students as of December 2014. BFSP was set up in 2011 and the subjects covered include Karen, Burmese, English, mathematics, science and social studies. Since 2012, RefugeeSingapore (RSG), a local Singaporean NGO, has been helping BFSP while other NGOs such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Right to Play and Save the Children also work on BDY's educational programs. As of July 2015, BFSP is closed as RSG stopped funding teachers' salaries and library resources, and ZOA has channeled funds into 'rehabilitation type of work' elsewhere (ZOA International 2014). TBC has also reoriented its programs from 'care and maintenance' to 'preparedness for return' (TBC, 2013).

The Karen Refugee Committee has its own Education Entity (KRCEE) and has set up the Institute of Higher Education (IHE), which views itself as the flagship of the Karen Education Department. The IHE oversees campuses at different refugee camps. KRCEE members visit the camps' educational facilities and provide a common curriculum. However, they do not provide any other resources or teachers' training. In reality, the teachers decide what, how and when to teach. None of them hold teaching qualifications: while four have university degrees and one has a high school diploma; none have degrees in education. Teachers also have no written teaching schedules. On both visits to BDY in May 2012 and December 2014, the teachers failed to provide any written material suggesting weekly teaching schedules.

Big camps like Mae La have internationally recognized schools such as the Thai-Burma Program by the Australian Catholic University, the Minmahaw Higher Education Program or the Leadership and Management Training College, which can empower the future generation for greater personal, community and political security. Others also have more

professional programs such as the Global Border Studies, the Wide Horizons Program or the English Immersion Program. The lessons focus on English, computer and topics relevant to democracy and human rights, and culminate in an internship at a local CBO to nurture next generation of 'democracy' leaders. Some programs include professional management at a basic level. These programs might generate immediate income for graduates if the internships lead to more permanent employment, but there is no guarantee for economic security for the refugee youth.

## Conclusion

As shown in this study, the fear of repatriation and the human insecurities of the BDY residents are real, and affect residents more than persecution as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention. For this reason, the camp population has indeed decreased over the past few years and 'brain drain' is a notable trend. At the BFSP, the camp's only post-secondary school, the principal has left for resettlement in the United States and there are no full-time teachers as of March 2015. The only competent English-speaking teacher also left the camp in early 2014. Those who document the Karen diaspora have been blaming Western donors for indirectly forcing refugees to return to Burma by reducing or cutting their aid programs and for therefore putting these refugees at greater risk.

This article follows the UNDP's well-defined seven pillars of human security framework to examine the multi-dimensional human security conditions in the BDY camp. It concludes that community, food, and health security is relatively well-protected due to the design of international aid programs. There are some concerns about personal security in terms of domestic and community violence within the camp, as well as arbitrary search and possible forced repatriation by the Thai military regime. The economic and environmental security of Karen refugees are in grave danger mainly due to the immobility created by their refugee status. Refugees do not have any political representation in Thailand or full autonomy and permanent peace in Burma yet. How the results of the 2015 election in Burma will shape the prospect of Karen refugees in Thailand and their human security remains unclear.

The conclusion drawn from this research is that community-based post-secondary education and language/vocational training are vitally important for this vulnerable population in the Thai-Burma border areas. The camps are supposed to be temporary and may be closed at any time, given the recent political landscape both in Thailand and Burma. Karen refugees largely have three options: 1) going back to Burma; 2) resettlement in a third country such as the US or Australia; or 3) social integration into Thailand. Community-based education and vocational training that encompass both Karen and local communities are more durable solutions: wherever the recipients of these programs go next, they have a means to survive. The international community, before diverting funding from the camps to Burma, must make sure at least basic physical personal security, infrastructure and most importantly, schools and quality training programs are in place. The nascent government in Burma will take time to develop human capital as educational reforms need long-term effort and persistence. Businesses and civil society can also help greatly in this area by investing in better skilled labor for Burma.

## Acknowledgement

This study was generously funded by the Singapore Ministry of Education (Fund No. 14-C242-SMU-006). The author would like to thank the students who help initiate this research, including Joanna Lee, Zachary Chua, Lor Jun Ying, Tong Hon Yee, Anusha Kunnasakaram and Ralph Tay for helping with the fieldwork and literature review for this research. She would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on the earlier version of the manuscript. The article is dedicated to the memory of Joanna Lee (19 November 1990-12 May 2014).

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