JUST WAITING TO DIE? *

Cambodian Refugees in Thailand

Report of a tour to the Thai-Cambodian border and subsequent research

by

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* Comment from refugees interviewed by Dr. Reynell. See page 24.
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**Annexes:**

1. Voluntary agencies working on the border

Map 1: The border camps in 1980

Map 2: UNBRO-assisted camps, 1986
Introduction

From November 20th to December 22nd 1986 I visited Thailand as a member of the first World Food Programme (WFP) evaluation mission to look at the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO). Three of the others were from WFP: the team leader, Mr Broniek Szyndalski, Mr Werner Schleijfer and Mr Bruce Crawshaw. The remaining three were, like myself, independent outsiders: Dr. Josephine Reynell from the Refugee Studies Programme, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford; Dr. Rob Stephenson from the Relief and Development Institute, London; and Dr Susan Forbes, of the Refugee Policy Group, Washington D.C.

A dozen non-governmental agencies (NGOs), funded by UNBRO, provide specialized services for the refugees. WFP therefore asked the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the NGO 'umbrella' group based in Geneva, to nominate an NGO staff member from an agency not working on the border, to be part of the evaluation team and look particularly at NGO activities.

In 1979-80 Oxfam donated £300,000, most of it to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for emergency relief work on the border, but has not been directly involved since then. Thus Oxfam was asked to send an evaluator to Thailand, with the special brief of examining the work of the NGOs.

Background to the United Nations agencies involved

The United Nations itself is responsible for the border relief programme. UNBRO comes under the overall authority of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for Humanitarian Assistance to the Kampuchean People. Up to March 1987 the office was held by Mr Tatsuro Kunugi. The main tasks of the Special Representative are to mobilise resources for the humanitarian programme, to coordinate activities of the UN Agencies and other international bodies involved, and to consult with governments and other authorities concerned with the work.

UNBRO was formed in January 1982 to look after the needs of Cambodians living in camps on the Thai-Cambodian border. This task had previously been carried out by UNICEF.

WFP helped establish UNBRO by lending its institutional support and now purchases food commodities and provides international professional staff for the operation.

Every year UNBRO holds regular meetings of donors to raise funds for its work. It receives the bulk of its income in cash. From 1979 to 1984 the UN Kampuchea Emergency Operation spent $221 million on the border operation. The programme currently costs about US$36 million a year. The majority of funds came from bilateral donations, with the USA giving 33%, Japan 28% and the EEC 8%.
UNBRO provides basic humanitarian assistance to over 250,000 displaced Cambodians, including food rations, supplementary feeding, water, fuelwood, essential non-food items such as blankets and mosquito nets, medical care and support for educational and social welfare activities.

Twelve voluntary agencies, coordinated and funded mainly by UNBRO carry out nutritional, health and sanitation work with the refugees. (See list, Annex 1).

Background to the Evaluation

Although the WFP has had a major role in establishing and servicing UNBRO, there had never been any WFP evaluation of its work in the four years since it was founded. Our team was asked to carry out a comprehensive review of UNBRO’s activities, with particular reference to WFP involvement. One aim was to determine the likely long-term needs of the operation. Another was to assess the effectiveness of voluntary agency (NGO) involvement.

One of the terms of reference asked that the team determine the social and economic effects of the programme on the camp population. At a briefing with WFP officers in Rome, before leaving for Bangkok, we were asked to look at the relief operation from a 'human perspective'. "We regard the evaluation as an opportunity to look at the broader issues" said the acting chief of the WFP Evaluation Service.

This report, submitted to ICVA, tries to do just that. It is my own account of our findings, with suggestions to ICVA for follow-up action. Since returning from Thailand I have discussed the issues with a number of people involved with the border, and read many documents and articles. I have incorporated this research into the report. The views expressed are my own, and do not necessarily represent those of my fellow evaluators or of WFP.

WFP will publish two reports of the mission. The first, a short "Summary Evaluation Report" will be submitted to the WFP Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA) meeting in October 1987 (1). The second, a longer analysis of the UNBRO programme, will be made available by WFP to CFA delegates later this year.

It should be emphasized that the very efficient delivery by UNBRO of relief items, and the good technical work by the NGOs, is not in question. Rather, the overall result of the effort, particularly the support it gives to a resistance movement dominated by the Khmer Rouge and the hopeless future it creates for the people in the camps are the major concern in this report.
Background to the Camps

By early 1979 after almost four years of rule by the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, Cambodia lay in ruins. In the months following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fled to the border with Thailand. Feeding and medical services were soon set up by UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a host of voluntary agencies and by December 1979, almost half a million Cambodians were receiving assistance.

At first the Royal Thai Government (RTG) refused to allow any Cambodians to enter the country, but under international pressure it agreed in October 1979 to create 'holding centres' in Thailand and away from the border, where Cambodians could stay pending possible resettlement in third countries.

The best-known holding centre is Khao I Dang, which opened in November 1979 and closed to new arrivals in January 1980. Many thousands of Cambodians have managed to bribe their way since then into the camp. People in Khao I Dang are classified as refugees and therefore may be considered for emigration. Over 200,000 Cambodians have been resettled abroad since 1979. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has provided the support necessary for these people.

The majority of Cambodians fleeing to the border were not so lucky. They have never been classified as refugees by the Thais, but as 'displaced' persons, with no prospect for resettlement in third countries. Indeed, until 1984, Thailand would not allow them to enter the country. Instead it asked UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to continue the border programme, providing food and medical care. By 1980, some 95 voluntary agencies were also working there. [See map 1 for 1980 location of camps.] Thousands of displaced people were soon living in this volatile and dangerous no-mans-land.

Some observers believe that because the camps supported guerrilla groups fighting the Vietnamese/People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) the Royal Thai Government did not want to close them down and bring the refugees to a safer area inside Thailand. According to former relief workers, Linda Mason and Roger Brown in their book, *Rice, Rivalry, and Politics*, the reason the Thais wanted the border operation to continue is simple:

"Thailand wanted the resistance movements there to receive aid". (2)

Each camp developed its own administration and became affiliated to a political grouping; Khmer Rouge, (the Forces of Democratic Free Kampuchea, recognised till 1982 as the legitimate representative of Kampuchea by the United Nations), Khmer Serei (Free Khmers), Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPLNF) led by Son Sann and Moulinaka,
Map 1

THE BORDER IN 1980 - CAMPS UNDERLINED

from Rice, Rivalry and Politics, Mason and Brown,
University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
followers of Prince Sihanouk. Particularly in the non-Khmer Rouge camps, there was much trading in smuggled gold and other black-market goods. The lucrative gains that could be made from trading soon led to rivalry and corruption involving the war lords in charge of the camps, often flaring into open hostilities.

While traders and war lords flourished, so did the Khmer Rouge, a defeated force when they first reached the border. They managed to keep a captive civilian population under their control as they fell back. In *Red Brotherhood at War*, Grant Evans and Kevin Rowley report one incident that took place in 1979:

"At one point Pol Pot's forces escaped only by retreating into Thailand. Western journalists watched as between 50-80,000 people trekked for thirty miles along roads well on the Thai side of the border before re-entering Cambodia. There were thousands of tough young soldiers herding along a captive workforce of sullen and malnourished villagers at gunpoint - 'a walking concentration camp' was how one of the observers later described this weary procession."(3)

The Khmer Rouge were soon able to rebuild their military strength and begin attacking Vietnamese/PRK positions in Cambodia.

An important positive feature of those camps not under Khmer Rouge control was mobility. Mason and Brown describe this aspect as follows:

"At the border, movement was a way of life. A camp had no fixed and enforced boundaries, and refugees frequently made trips back to the interior of Kampuchea. The population of a camp could double in anticipation of a distribution, or be cut in half by an attack." (4)

These were the camps that UNBRO took over in 1982. Since they contained large numbers of soldiers, the Vietnamese saw them as legitimate targets to shell. Between 1982 and 1984 UNBRO supervised 85 camp evacuations, 65 of them under shelling. Many hundreds of thousands of people were involved.

During the 1984-5 dry season the Vietnamese launched a major offensive against all the camps on the border. Their aim appeared to be to smash the camps and drive all those living in them into Thailand. They succeeded, and in doing so, completely changed the nature of the border operation.
MAP 2
SKETCH MAP SHOWING LOCATIONS OF THAI/CAMBODIAN BORDER CAMPS SUPPORTED BY UNBRO

THAILAND

KHAO I DANG (UNHCR)

to Bangkok

ARANYA PRATHET (UNBRO Main Field Office)

BATTAMBANG

SITE 2 (KPNLF)

SITE 8 (KR)

BORAI (KR)

SOK SANN (KPNLF)

TA LUAN (KR)

GREEN HILL (SIHANOUK)

NATRAO (KR)

HUAY CHAN (KR)

SIEM REAP

KOMPONG THOM

KOMPONG CHHNANG
to Phnom Penh

Gulf of Thailand

Tonle Sap
Lake

Scale: 0 50 100 150 Miles
0 50 100 150 Km

International Border

Roads

KR = Khmer Rouge
KPNLF = Khmer People’s National Liberation Front
SIHANOUK = Followers of Prince Sihanouk

Satellite military camps (hidden border) not shown on this map.

Beneficiaries of UNBRO Food Distribution – as of December 1986

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<td>8,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natrao</td>
<td>12,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Hill</td>
<td>41,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>143,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 8</td>
<td>30,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo Rai</td>
<td>3,438</td>
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<td>Sok Sann</td>
<td>7,483</td>
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<td>Ta Luang</td>
<td>4,238</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khmer Rouge</td>
<td>59,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPNLF</td>
<td>151,194</td>
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<tr>
<td>Followers of Prince Sihanouk</td>
<td>41,712</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>252,188</strong></td>
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</table>
From Open to Closed Camps

Whereas previously people had been on the border but in Cambodia, they are now just inside Thailand. The whole Thai border area is under martial law, and the refugees (4a) therefore come under the authority of the Thai military. In addition, all the camps are now closed areas, with access in and out extremely difficult, except for soldiers and black marketeers.

Since the RTG only recognises the Khmers as displaced persons, and not refugees, they have effectively been deprived of any formal human rights. As will be described later, this has enormous negative consequences on inmates of the camps (See section on protection, p.14).

The Camps in Thailand

In November 1986 there were over 252,000 people classified by UNBRO as civilians and living in 8 camps, strung out over a 400 mile stretch just inside Thailand along its border with Cambodia (see map 2). The major feature of the population profile is that an extremely large number of children are under 15. The number reported is 150,000. Of them, about 70,000 are under 5 years old, according to the World Health Organisation. Another important point is that the border camps have one of the highest birth rates in the world, about 5% per annum. The population could increase by half in 8-10 years.

Protecting the Camps

As noted already, these are closed camps, guarded by Thai rangers. Ranger units were originally formed as village defence forces to suppress communist insurgency in Thailand in the 1970s. The rangers assigned to guard the camps belong to Task Forces (TF) 80 and 320. TF 80 is in charge of Sites 2 and 8, so most refugees come under its care. TF 80 soldiers are young men, with little military training and poor discipline. Some are suspected of having criminal records.

The Hidden Border

Near each of the camps are satellite military camps, where thousands more Cambodians live. There are, for example, three military camps run by the Khmer Rouge within a few miles of Site 8. Until 1985 UNBRO provided food for one of them, Site 8 North, but stopped when it found it could not adequately monitor who received the food. Some miles from Natrao and Huay Chan, on the road to Surin, there is a Khmer Rouge ammunition dump. Various military facilities lie a few miles from Site 2, including a hospital. It is believed that at least 10,000 civilians, and possibly many more, live in these military camps, out of the reach of UNBRO and ICRC (5).
The military camps form what relief staff call 'the hidden border'. When the camps were on the border, but in Cambodia, civilians and military lived in them together and efforts to feed non-combatants only proved impossible. UNICEF, and then UNBRO, decided on a firm policy to separate the two groups physically, hence the clear geographical distinction today. In this way too, safety for the civilians is believed to be more assured. In theory then, only civilians receive aid in the 8 camps currently served by UNBRO.

Administration of the Camps

Five of the camps are administered by the Khmer Rouge, two by the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and one by followers of Prince Sihanouk. As Map 2 shows, in numbers the KPNLF has most people under its control, over 151,000, the Khmer Rouge 59,000 and the Sihanoukists 41,000. It is these three groups that, since 1982, make up the UN-recognised Coalition Democratic Government of Kampuchea (CDGK).

The KPNLF Site 2 is divided into 5 camps, all contiguous to each other. It is an amalgamation of various different camps whose populations were brought together after crossing the border in 1985. Each camp in Site 2 has its own administration.

Supplying Aid to the Camps

UNBRO provides all basic foodstuffs, rice, tinned and dried salted fish, salt and, to Site 2, vegetables in the dry season. It also provides water to Site 2, and housing materials, thatch and bamboo, to all main camps. Firewood also comes from UNBRO as do education materials. In Thailand, UNBRO is fully operational, with a staff of over 100, and a fleet of hired lorries, serviced at its main field office in Aranyaprathet.

UNBRO provides food directly to the three largest camps, Sites 2 and 8 and Greenhill. It also buys food for the other camps but this is delivered by the Thai military. Water for Site 2 has to be brought in every day by water tankers, under a contract paid for by UNBRO.

UNBRO and NGO staff only have access to the camps in daylight hours. This lack of access by night has serious consequences for the protection of refugees, as will be described later.
General Description of the Camps

In size, location and character, the camps differ quite substantially. They fall into three types: first, Khmer Rouge camps where only token UN access is allowed; secondly, Sok Sann and Greenhill, and third, Sites 2 and 8. They are all located within 6 miles of the border with Cambodia, all are within easy shelling distance of the Vietnamese guns; all are in exceedingly dangerous areas.

Four camps, Ta Luan, Bo Rai, Natrao and Huay Chan, run by the Khmer Rouge, are virtually out of bounds to UN staff, although UNBRO provides them with food aid via the Thai military. UNBRO was allowed only one 10-minute visit to Ta Luan, for example, in the three years up to November 1985. (6)

Some of these camps have out-patients departments and rehabilitation centres run by voluntary agencies on the perimeter. All four camps are located in hilly, well-wooded countryside, at a good distance from main roads.

Our evaluation team tried to enter Ta Luan and Bo Rai, where UNBRO donates food, but, although we were accompanied by the UNBRO representative for the area, we were only allowed as far as the entrance to Ta Luan and an out-patients clinic and rehabilitation centre about an hour and a half away by foot from Bo Rai.

Huay Chan

When we arrived at Huay Chan, where UNBRO has 8,375 beneficiaries, we were met by nine young men dressed in green army uniforms and carrying sub-machine guns. After a while they marched off, away from the camp, apparently on patrol. Other men dressed in green passed by from time to time. Two walked by in single file, each carrying a rocket-propelled grenade over the shoulder, and large green knapsacks with several chickens attached to them.

The deputy camp administrator spoke with us at length. We asked him to describe the camp: 'This is a resistance camp,' he said, 'everything we do is to support the military'. According to the UNBRO official who accompanied us, the administrator of the camp is Son Sen, former Minister of Defence under Pol Pot.

We were allowed to take a walk inside the camp: it is pleasant and well-ordered, very like a Cambodian village, we were told, with the houses spaced apart and vegetables being grown on patches of earth mounted on stilts, to keep animals out. People seemed in good health and said they ate three meals a day.
We visited a couple of warehouses stocked with UNBRO rice, salt and oil. Khmer officials complained that the Thais made them sign for more sacks of rice than they actually received, when deliveries were made.

Natrao

The camp at Natrao, where UNBRO provides rations for over 12,000 people is made up of four separate villages, well blended into the wooded countryside. It is administered by Ta Mok, a close ally of Pol Pot. Ta Mok was responsible for carrying out some of the purges that characterised the late 70s in Cambodia. An UNBRO official in Aranyapratthet told us that he was more ruthless than Pol Pot himself. Ta Mok’s nickname is "The butcher of Kampuchea" (7).

In September 1986 officials from UNBRO and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) went to Natrao to donate insecticide and stationery as well as 1,450 kgs of used clothing. At the meeting point they were met by 200 armed soldiers (8). We ourselves saw no sign of military activity and instead spent time talking with a group of teachers in one of a series of bamboo and thatch classrooms. Along one of the walls was a motto. It turned out to be a saying of President Kennedy's: "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country." Given the Khmer Rouge's murderous record, this seemed an ironic slogan.

During a brief walk around a small section of the camp we came across a very sick young boy lying in a hut, listless and extremely thin. He had been ill for five or six days with dysentery. The UNBRO official asked why he was not in the hospital. He was told that the hospital was no longer in the village but a morning's walk away.

The lack of military presence plus the moving of the hospital suggest that the soldiers had left the camp for Cambodia. Military aspects of the area were reinforced as we left. We were given Khmer Rouge calendars for 1987, in full colour, with photos of soldiers, both men and women, in the plains and jungles of Cambodia. One photo (for November) shows a group of women working in the fields. They are surrounded by armed soldiers - "Our villagers are free to do agricultural works" explains the calendar.

The question of whether to keep feeding Khmer Rouge military camps is one that has dogged agencies working on the border since 1979. A UNICEF progress report from 6th May 1980 noted:-

Distribution [in the Khmer Rouge camp] took place as scheduled. The operation is still awaiting a policy decision on continuation of distribution in these areas. As previously reported, it is basically a military force we are supporting here." (9)
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Our villagers are free to do agriculture works
Our own mission is recommending the usual UN policy for aid-giving, that the UN should have full access to the camps to monitor the use of the aid. We recommend aid only be given in those circumstances.

Sok Sann and Greenhill

These two camps are both open to UN monitoring by day and, although belonging to different political groups - Sok Sann is KPNLF and Greenhill, Sihanoukist - are similar in atmosphere. Both are overtly in favour of the resistance. Like the Khmer Rouge camps, above, they are located in hilly, well wooded countryside.

When the evaluation team arrived in Sok Sann the whole camp, some 8,000 people, were lined up to greet it. The almost evangelical fervour found there is illustrated by the large sign in Khmer and English that dominates the centre of the camp: "Four Absolutes (sic) Standard, of Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love, Please."

The camp administrator told us: 'This camp works for the liberation of our country. I want to stay on the border to get our country back. 90% of the young men want to be soldiers.' The hospital director confirmed what the administrator had said. He told me: 'We consider ourselves as a resistance people so all our staff have the will to work. There is no corruption here, no market or sales of drugs.'

Sok Sann has a Civic School, similar to other camps where they are known as Psychological Warfare Schools. Everyone in the camp attends courses lasting for ten days. When we visited a class, about thirty young people were chanting anti-Vietnamese songs. They all wore neckerchiefs, arranged in a neat "y" shape at the back of the neck. It was clear that the School serves as a political education centre.

Although we saw no soldiers at the camp, a random check of the camp rolls showed that 17% were classified as soldiers. Given that over 60% of the camp population are under 17, this means that most men are in the military.

Perhaps the most tolerable of all the eight camps is Greenhill. No barbed wire surrounds it, and security is relaxed. It is the only camp with a legalised cooperative shop, where over 200 basic items are on sale. UNBRO provides food for over 41,000 and many other donors, from Prince Sihanouk himself to the German embassy, also give substantial quantities of aid. It is the best supported camp of them all. A Sihanoukist Information Bulletin for October 1985, for example, reports that the West German government donated a large quantity of food, including 12,000 cans of chicken curry, the same number of beef curry, 10,000 bottles of fish sauce and 23,040 cans of mixed vegetable pickle. The magazine also notes that 109 volunteers carried food into Cambodia (10).
An administrator told me early in our visit that I would not see many young men around. He explained that about 10,000 of the camp's population were inside Cambodia and return to Greenhill just to rest. The Information Bulletin mentioned above says that in September 1986, 3,392 soldiers were in the camp for rest and recreation. I interviewed half-a-dozen women and asked them where their husbands were. With the military, they said. Eight young men questioned at various points during a tour of the camp told me they were there for a while before returning to the army.

Like Sok Sann, Greenhill is a rear-base military support camp.

Sites 2 and 8

The camps described so far account for about 77,000 people cared for by UNBRO and the voluntary agencies. The remaining 175,000 live in Sites 2 and 8. These camps, then, not only contain about 70% of all the displaced persons along the border, but they are also the most problematic in virtually every way.

Site 2 constitutes the second biggest Khmer city in the world after Phnom Penh, and the fourth largest in Thailand. In almost every respect conditions are much worse than in Sok Sann and Greenhill: rape and robbery are quite common - fear of rape, widespread. There is a general air of hopelessness and lack of purpose. People have little or nothing to plan for or look forward to in the future. Most of those questioned by Dr. Reynell said they were disillusioned with the resistance effort as the KPNLF army is disorganized and undisciplined (11).

Site 2 is located a mile from the border, on very poor land and with no ground water. It lies on a huge plain that runs deep into Cambodia and Thailand. A Thai-built tank ditch running some miles south starts just outside. There are very few trees, making it hot and dusty in the dry season. A few hundred yards to the north is a long well-wooded hill. It is used by Cambodian bandits for raiding the camp. The camp is surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by Task Force 80 rangers. All in all, Site 2 has a foreboding and sinister air to it.

The lack of water in the dry season means that UNBRO has to bring in water every day to the camp. This comes in a fleet of lorries, which provide a bucket of water per person per day, at a cost of $170,000 a month.

In organisational terms, Site 2 is badly served. It has five administrations which, though broadly following the KPNLF, still fall into two factions, one adherents of Son Sann, a former prime minister of Cambodia in the sixties, the other under the control of General Sak Sutsakhan, the KPNLF military chief.
In their previous locations inside Cambodia the camps that now make up Site 2 were as much black market trading centres as resistance camps, with the soldiers involved in smuggling as well as fighting. The Thais still do not allow legal trade in Site 2, so the black market continues to flourish. On food distribution days Thai traders come into the camp in large numbers on bicycles and carry UNBRO food away to sell elsewhere. The black market causes tension and friction and violent incidents take place in the camp at points where the trade route passes.

Site 2 also serves as a rest centre for soldiers who are brought in on Sundays to visit their families. They stay from several days to a few weeks. They are not generally as disciplined as in the other camps and when drunk are reported to be the cause of fighting at night. In September 1986 a dispute between soldiers and the Cambodian civilian police in the camp (an unarmed group organised by the camp administration) led to a mine being planted in the police volley-ball area. A pregnant woman stepped on it, blowing her leg off.

Heavily populated, overcrowded, dominated as much by black marketers as the resistance and lacking the political zeal of Sok Sann and Greenhill, Site 2, with its poor land and lack of water, epitomises the hopelessness and futility of the border populations.

Thais from the surrounding area sense this and on Sundays visit Site 2, sometimes handing out fruit. An UNBRO official said residents complained that this made them feel like 'chickens in a cage'. Others complain of feeling like animals in a zoo, or of being in prison.

Site 8 also lies on a plain, but has good sources of water and the land is fertile. Nearby hills hide the three satellite military camps.

Site 8 is the only Khmer Rouge camp accessible by day to UNBRO and the voluntary agencies. Many of the population here are not Khmer Rouge supporters but were forced across the border by them in 1985. Others came to the camp by mistake, unaware who was running it. At least a third of Site 8's 30,000 people would prefer to live in a non-Khmer Rouge camp, officials estimate (12).

It is the Khmer Rouge control of Site 8 that gives most reason to be concerned about the people living in it. The commander of the Khmer Rouge 320th Division, Nykorn, who has substantial authority over Site 8, was a ranking Foreign Ministry official when the Pol Pot regime was in power. The 1987 report by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, analysing human rights violations on the border, notes that 'rigid control' remains a feature of life in Khmer Rouge camps and describes how one interview in Site 8 was carried
out 'in hushed tones, with someone standing watch outside'. Another interview, 'with a palpably terrified subject, was prematurely terminated when a uniformed man hovered outside the room' (13).

Site 8 appears to serve the Khmer Rouge as a hostage community that helps it gain international credibility as a member of the Coalition Government with a civilian population under its control.

Military/civilian Links

The main rationale for the UNBRO programme is that it serves the humanitarian aim of caring for 252,000 displaced persons. In October 1986, the UN Secretary General reported to the United Nations General Assembly on October 14th, 1986 as follows:

Most of the nearly one quarter of a million Kampuchean civilians who sought refuge inside Thailand following an upsurge of hostilities along the border in late 1984/early 1985 have remained in evacuation sites operated by the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO). Through a separation of the civilian population from the non-civilian elements in all of the large evacuation sites along the border, the civilian nature of these encampments has been ensured in the past 18 months, and this has contributed to reducing human suffering, danger and instability in the life of these civilians. (14)

UNBRO monthly field reports spell out a similar message. A typical Situation Report of 15 August 1986 acknowledges some problems but gives a positive impression overall:

'UNBRO continues to be satisfied by the efforts made by the Royal Thai Government and Khmer leadership to ensure the civilian nature of Site II and the other large border encampments, but believes that some of the smaller northern and southern border encampments may still be affected by the presence of non-military elements.' (15)

Evidence suggests other interpretations. The very extensive use of the camps as rest and recreation for the soldiers has already been mentioned. On many other levels of detail the close links between the civilian and military become clear; it affects many aspects of camp life as well as the work of the UN and the NGOs.
As mentioned already, administrators in Sok Sann and Huay Chan openly told us of their camps' military purpose. An article in the English-language Thai paper, The Nation, of December 14th 1986 reports an attempt by General Sak, military chief of the KPNLF, to tighten his control over Site 2, saying that 'since this was a total war, it was impractical to have a military leader and a civilian leader [for Site 2] at the same time. The reorganization was a must to ensure that everybody at the rear-line base make contributions to the struggle against the Vietnamese'.

In the survey carried out by Dr. Reynell in August 1986 large percentages of men gave their occupations as soldiers: 37% in Site 2 and 50% in Greenhill. Only 2% of men in Site 8 are soldiers with another 13% there working as ammunition porters. Women too act as ammunition carriers and some camps also have a small number of children under 16 as soldiers (16).

When young men reach the age of 17, they become eligible for the draft, and have little choice but to join the army. Some, who have refused, are reported to have "disappeared". With about 150,000 of the camps' population under 15, this means many thousands of youths will soon be ready to join the resistance. The camps serve as an important breeding-ground for tomorrow's fighters.

Soldiers living in the 'civilian' camps naturally eat UNBRO food. In Sok Sann and Greenhill, soldiers are included in the headcount for food. In some camps they are given food rations by the administration when they leave for the front, two kgs of rice and 2 cans of fish for those in Site 2 for example. Vegetables grown communally in Site 2 are also used in part to feed the military (17).

The medical service also provides valuable support for the military. In November 1986 camp hospitals contained large numbers of soldiers: 160 young men were admitted in Site 2 suffering from malaria, contracted outside the camp in the forests nearby. (There is no malaria in the camps.) For Site 8 from February to November, 1986, 121 out of 187 patients coming for artificial limbs were soldiers. According to one report from an NGO staff member involved, it is an open secret that many amputees have to carry ammunition to the front, once fitted with their replacement leg (18). One man had his leg blown off again. Luckily, it was the wooden one.

Even training courses are not outside the reach of the military. As part of a self-reliance programme, several voluntary agencies have carried out an intensive training course for Cambodians to enable them to qualify as medics and work in camp hospitals. The first medics completed their training in 1986. About half were soon called up into the military to work in field hospitals. Badly hit were CRS in Greenhill, who lost 15 of 32 medics. CRS also lost many of their senior trained staff including the Head Medic and Head Administrator (19). Similarly, another American agency, CAMA, reported that it lost half of its trained medics from
Site 8 last year (20).

UNBRO supplies large quantities of drugs for use in the camps; a certain quantity of them are stolen for use by the military. Even seemingly innocent activity gets coopted; in Greenhill there are 40 sewing machines used partly to make shirts, holsters, scarves and other items for the soldiers (21).

Evidence from the border, then, suggests that the separation between the military and civilians has only been partially successful, in that armed soldiers no longer roam the non-Khmer Rouge Camps or Site 8. However, in more general terms, there is an inextricable link between the military and civilians. Without the support provided by the 'civilian' camps, it would be much harder for the Coalition resistance to continue. An UNBRO official even went so far as to say that he felt 'morally ambiguous' about the relief work: 'If the UN stopped feeding the soldiers' wives and families, the resistance would stop' (22).

While the above statement may be an exaggeration, there can be little doubt that the eight UNBRO-supported camps allow the anti-Vietnamese/PRK forces to carry out their guerilla incursions into Cambodia. The camp administrations obviously believe this. They see their role first and foremost as support for the resistance.

The above was put most succinctly by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, in its report on South-East Asia and Indo-China, published in February 1987. Of the UNBRO-supported camps, the Committee notes:—

"It is also clear that the evacuee camps on the Cambodian border, although nominally supervised by the United Nations, in practice provide safe havens for the resistance groups and may be regarded, if not as training bases, at least as convenient rest and recreation bases for the armed resistance groups. We were particularly struck during our visits to some of the border camps by the degree of independence given to KPNLF and ANS leaders in the internal administration of the camps and by the relative scarcity of young men of military age amongst their resident populations". (23)

Protection and Security

The 252,000 Khmer in the camps are in a highly anomalous legal position. In theory they come under the care of the Coalition Government. In fact since they are in Thailand, in an area under martial law, they are under the control of the Thai military. In general, people cannot leave the camps except for military purposes or on payment of a bribe to the Task Force Rangers. They are in effect a captive population, deprived of human rights.
The Thai government classifies people in the camps as displaced, not as refugees. This means that they do not qualify for protection from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the international civil servant charged with protecting refugees. As refugees, people have certain rights based on international law. There is no similar multilateral treaty for the displaced, whose fate is left to the particular governments involved.

To make matters worse, the two agencies in Aranyaprathet who have a role in protection and security, UNBRO and the ICRC, did not appear at the time of our visit, even to agree whose responsibility it was to look after the physical safety of the refugees. Both claimed to be involved with protection, while the voluntary agencies seemed genuinely confused: they said they reported incidents of violence to UNBRO but as one staffer commented: 'As far as protection goes, I still don't know who's doing what.'

Although all the people in the camps are equally affected by their lack of legal status and rights, it is again those living in Sites 2 and 8 who suffer most abuse. In Greenhill and Sok Sann where discipline is better and there is a more obvious resistance ethos, violence was not reported as being a major concern. There too, however, there are cases of political intimidation (24). It should be noted that nothing is known about protection problems in the four Khmer Rouge camps out of bounds to UNBRO supervision.

Incidents of violence perpetrated against people in Sites 2 and 8 came from two main sources: KPNLF deserters or regular troops and Thai rangers belonging to TF80.

The February 1987 report by the U.S. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, summarises Thai ranger violence as follows:

Rangers have robbed, beaten and raped the residents of some camps, with apparent impunity". The report gives many detailed descriptions of Ranger abuses and notes that their officers have done little to discipline wrongdoers. "The Rangers' conduct has generated an atmosphere of fear even among those who have not personally been victimized", the lawyers add (25).

KPNLF troops as well as deserters from its army have also been responsible for violent attacks on people trying to reach the camps:

"Girls as young as 11 years old have been repeatedly gang-raped, by KPNLF troops in particular. Once intercepted by these troops, the victims have often been detained at KPNLF bases along the [hidden] border, where they are held until 'ransoms' are paid by relatives abroad or in Thailand". (26)

People are little safer when they reach the camps, especially Sites 2 and 8. Site 2 was repeatedly raided in September and October 1986. Six people were killed in Sites 2 and 8 in
Distribution of dried fish, Site 8, December 1986.
Above: Women and children going to food distribution, Site 8, December 1986

Below: Food distribution about to begin, Site 8, December 1986
Greenhill (above) and Site 2 (below): about 150,000 of the camps' population are under 15 years of age.
Water being delivered to Site 2. This costs UNBRO $170,000 per month. In the dry season, it provides each person with a bucket of water a day.

September 1986. There were also 23 non-fatal violent incidents (27). An example of non-fatal violence occurred in December 1986 in Site 8 when 14 Khmer men were caught catching grasshoppers, fishing and smuggling outside the camp. An UNBRO report says that they were badly beaten and kick-boxed by a group of TF 80 rangers, using brass knuckles. Six of the victims were so badly hurt they were taken to hospital, some of them unconscious (28).

A particular problem faces people living in Khmer Rouge camps: their removal to military camps or into Cambodia. Once this happens, people lose even the partial protection that UNBRO and ICRC can offer.

Removals have been a continual trend. In August and September 1985, about 5,000 civilians were removed by night from Site 8 to Site 8 North, and possibly other locations. In March 1986, about 1,500 people in Huay Chan returned to Cambodia. In January 1987 1,683 civilians were taken, again under cover of darkness, from Site 8 - this time to Natrao, the camp under Ta Mok's care. Another 121 people were taken in April/May 1987, again from Site 9 to Natrao, where the Khmer Rouge are reinforcing their positions. It is believed that the Khmer Rouge want to remove a further 4,000 civilians from Site 8. Of such transfers, the Lawyers Report notes that "the voluntariness and extent of these removals may never be known". (29)

Protection for the refugees was identified by almost all the voluntary agency staff we interviewed as the most pressing issue they were facing. Lamenting the lack of action, an UNBRO official in Bangkok tacitly agreed:

"We have people being killed, robbed and raped and the only weapon we have against it is talks with the government". (30)

This attitude, however, may be somewhat defeatist. The UN, through UNBRO, is a major funder of Task Force 80. This is because the Thai government does not offer any alternative to TF 80 protection so the UN feels almost forced to support it. Last year, UNBRO paid for the building of the newly-opened TF 80 headquarters near Aranyaprathet. This it did "rather unwillingly as a sort of ransom money" according to the leader of our evaluation team (31). The UN, in fact, is the only international body with any leverage to improve existing protection and security arrangements.

Now that the Cambodians have been in Thailand proper for almost two years, their legal status urgently needs defining.
There is a clear case for bringing them under the protection mandate of UNHCR. It is also time to proceed to establish how many of them are refugees, with the status and rights that implies, and how many want to return to Cambodia: when that is known, repatriation should be put firmly on the negotiating agenda.

On the related issue of security, the fact is that all the UNBRO-assisted camps are located within six miles of a dangerous and volatile border area - they are in a war zone. Shells frequently fall near, sometimes in, the camps. We could hear the distant crump of shells landing while we tried to enter Ta Luan. Scores of shells have recently been fired by the PRK/Vietnamese forces over Sok Sann. On January 26th 1987 four shells landed in Site 2. Eight people, including three children, were injured, one seriously.

Shells are not necessarily always fired at the camps by the PRK/Vietnamese forces: at least eleven people in Site 8 were killed, and from 30 to 50 injured, in a shelling on May 29th 1986. This happened at a time when the Thai authorities reportedly were planning to take civilians from Site 8 North (the Khmer Rouge military camp) into Site 8 itself, and moving the military camp to a new location. NGO staff and informed journalists in Bangkok believe that the Khmer Rouge leadership deliberately shelled the camp to prove to the Thai authorities that it would be too dangerous to move people there.* Site 8 North still exists.

Whether from the PRK/Vietnamese or Coalition forces, the camps are wide open to attack and the civilians in them live in constant danger. It is urgent therefore for the UN to negotiate with the Royal Thai Government to move the camps into a safe zone, out of shelling range and away from military personnel and installations.

* It is worth noting that Khmer Rouge camp administrators were not present in the camp when it was shelled. The number of soldiers coming to have artificial limbs fitted also dropped significantly in May. (See report by Filip Werbrouck., Ref. 18.)

Border Politics

What has led to the present inertia and political stalemate on the border? How is it that the Khmer Rouge, who just a few years ago were being denounced by the United States and other governments as the worst perpetrators of human rights violations since Hitler are now the acknowledged dominant military force in the Coalition Government?

A number of pressures lead to keeping the 252,000 people on the border as virtual hostages to supply the resistance movement. The presence of such a large population gives credence to the claims of the Coalition Government to have people to represent. If they were moved away and declared as refugees, not only would Coalition claims to govern be
severely weakened, but the source of their armies be removed. It is in the Coalition interests, then, for the situation to stay as it is.

The ASEAN Pact countries, particularly Thailand, fear Vietnamese expansion and therefore view the presence of an estimated 140,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia as a threat. In this they have the backing of the West, particularly the United States. Supporting the border population keeps thousands of Khmer soldiers protecting the area from possible attack.

China too is anti-Vietnamese. It is the chief supplier of arms to the resistance. An estimated 300-500 tonnes of military supplies is shipped each month to the border mainly to the Khmer Rouge whom the Chinese have long supported. This is seen as a cheap investment to keep so many thousands of Vietnamese troops tied up (32). China sends these weapons through Thailand.

While China serves as the main provider of war materials, UNBRO provides most of the food and, through the voluntary agencies, the health care, which enables the border population to survive. As one UNBRO official said to us: 'Politics makes strange bedfellows, but this has to be the strangest of them all'.

The diplomatic mechanism which allows the UN to give aid on the border comes from the fact that the UN recognises the Coalition as the legitimate government of Cambodia, although it does not control any territory in Cambodia and despite its almost total dependence on the UN for feeding ‘its’ people. It is a Coalition based on donated rice and a largely hostage population. In addition, it controls only a fraction of the Cambodian population: 252,000 out of an estimated 7 million people.

In many ways the recognition of the Coalition is the crux of the problem, both on the border and in Cambodia, which, as a result, is starved of most official development aid, access to the international banking system and of normal international relations — the Vietnamese-installed Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh is treated as a pariah.

Both the US and UK support the non-Communist resistance, while being opposed to any return to power of the Khmer Rouge. In its 1987 report, already mentioned, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee noted the military superiority of the Khmer Rouge but still concluded by advising the government to consider providing more humanitarian aid directly to the non-Communist resistance groups or indirectly to it through UNBRO (33).

This recommendation is problematic. If the resistance is to gain a military victory, then the Khmer Rouge will undoubtedly be by far the most powerful faction in Phnom Penh. Supporting the non-Communist resistance, then, inevitably means supporting the Khmer Rouge. As Professor
Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Director of the Security Studies Programme at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok writes:

"If the Khmer resistance forces prevail, the government of 'liberated' Kampuchea is bound to be dominated by the Khmer Rouge. Despite the much-touted improvements made by the non-communists, the facts are clear: while the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) has considerable assets in terms of its population base and number of troops but little or no unity or political will, the Armee Nationale Sihanoukiste (ANS) seems to have both the unity and the will, but not the numbers, and the Khmer Rouge remain by a long way the most coherent, organised, determined, well-armed and numerous of the three factions". (34, my emphasis)

At the moment, however, the most likely outcome is a continuation of the present low-intensity border war, with neither side gaining the upper hand. The price for the border population, unless some diplomatic activity is taken, is to serve for the foreseeable future as support for the resistance, and little else.

More on the Khmer Rouge

Adding to the abhorrence felt in the West towards the Khmer Rouge is the fact that many of those still in power in the KR leadership are the same people who ordered the massacres of thousands of Cambodians in the 70s. The Lawyer's report states:

"The same leadership that presided over the mass murders of that era remain substantially in control today". (35)

Though ailing, Pol Pot is still believed to retain control of the party. His successor, Son Sen, believed to be in charge of Huay Chan, was a key member of the Pol Pot government and the person to whom the director of the notorious Tuol Sleng extermination centre reported while supervising the torture and execution of 20,000 people from 1975 to 1978 (36).

As noted, Ta Mok, who is in charge of Natrao, organised the bloody purges in Cambodia in the 70s. According to UNBRO, he is the most influential Khmer Rouge leader in the North (37). Nykorn who commands the Khmer Rouge 320th Division and has authority over Site 8 was a ranking official in the Foreign Ministry when Pol Pot was in power. He was also implicated in the murder in 1978 of Malcolm Caldwell, the British academic, in Phnom Penh (38).

The Khmer Rouge continue to treat civilians with rigid control. They do not allow UNBRO to inoculate children and refused, in one known instance, to let a very sick young girl leave the Borai camp for hospitalisation in Khao I Dang. "Sorry," said a camp leader, "My orders are: no transfers." The girl died on February 8th 1986 (39).
Similarly, by early 1986, UNBRO had been forced to suspend its TB programme in Site 8 because the Khmer Rouge would not guarantee that patients would remain in camp for the full time needed for treatment. If patients were needed for military duties, they would be taken out of the camp, treated or not.

An article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (19 March 1987) reports that:

"Five months ago three female porters, who each headed up a unit of 15 women responsible for carrying weapons and food to Khmer Rouge fighters deep inside Cambodia, were executed after being caught trying to escape from Cham Krahom, a guerilla base along the border... This story was told by a woman who survived the escape attempt... Late last year, the woman's cousin, who also worked as porter at the Khmer Rouge base, was executed for sneaking away to marry a Khmer Rouge soldier, the woman said." (40)

Given the above, and the Khmer Rouge's military superiority in both arms and numbers the fear felt by many Cambodians of a return of the Khmer Rouge is real. Equally, the belief that it is possible to support only the non-Khmer Rouge section of the Coalition on the border is dangerous.

**Khao I Dang (KID)**

Much has appeared in newspapers recently about Khao I Dang. It is important to note the difference between it and the UNBRO border camps.

KID is a camp for Cambodians whom the Royal Thai Government will allow to seek resettlement in third countries. It opened in November 1979 and at its peak held over 130,000 refugees. The UN body active in KID is UNHCR whose capacity for protection is much stronger than UNBRO's. Over 200,000 refugees have passed through KID on their way to third countries.

In 1986 the Thai government announced it was going to close the camp. The reason appeared to be that the flow of refugees through it had slowed considerably in 1986. A hard-core of 24,000 people was still left on there, with only slim prospects of being accepted for resettlement. Many had been interviewed on several occasions by immigration officers from third countries and been turned down.

Perhaps to pressure these countries, Thailand plans to close the camp and disperse the remaining population in Greenhill and Site 2. The problem is that the KID population have voted with their feet by seeking refugee status and could well be viewed by the camp administrations as traitors, and therefore be in some danger if forced to move to new camps.
In addition, the important international principal that once refugee status is granted, it cannot be taken away without grave cause, is at stake.

Latest reports indicate that 219 Khmers have already been expelled from KID and forcibly removed to Greenhill (41). While I was in Greenhill I was shown a map drawn up by the camp administration showing where they wanted to house the KID people. For the Sihanoukistes, another influx of Khmers would mean a welcome increase in their numbers, more rations and more potential soldiers.

Press concentration on the fate of the 24,000 refugees in KID has however tended to obscure the main issue of the border - the fact that 250,000 people live a limbo-like existence, without even the protection the UNHCR can offer. And while solutions have been found for the majority of those who have passed through KID, no such solutions have so far been found for the refugees in the UNBRO-supported camps.

The role of Voluntary Agencies

The twelve voluntary agencies providing health, nutrition and sanitation input to the camps form a vital part of the work. Without them, UNBRO would be unable to provide many urgently needed services. The agencies all have contracts with UNBRO which in all but one case provide about 90% of their operating costs.

Technically the agencies are doing a very good job. Nutrition levels of children on the border are much better than comparable figures for Cambodia, according to the WHO. Hospitals provide a very comprehensive basic care while sanitation work has been more than satisfactory - problems that arise will do so because of overcrowding rather than lack of proper technical assistance.

Where the voluntary agencies have fallen down is not on the technical side of their work, but on another aspect where we pride ourselves on being strong - in serving as a voice for the people for whom they are working. If ever a group needed a voice, someone to speak up for them, it is the Khmers in the border camps. However the agencies have been effectively muzzled by their close association with UNBRO. Being almost totally dependent on it for funding appears to have made the agencies unwilling to look into the implications of their work.

The subordination of the agencies to UNBRO came out clearly when we attended one of the monthly UNBRO-voluntary agency meetings. The whole time was spent in a detailed statistical report by each agency of its work in the last month, even down to the number of saliva samples taken by several of them! There was no discussion about where this border programme was leading or what should be done to resolve the plight of people trapped in the camps.
In the first instance, UNBRO is responsible for the glaring lack of debate but the agencies have acquiesced easily enough. Several told me of one telling incident when, during the inter-agency meeting, they were instructed by UNBRO to refer to soldiers as "people from outside the camp". The phrase duly appears in agency reports, both oral and written. Efforts of this type to sanitize language lead to acceptance of the status quo rather than any questioning of it.

While UNBRO controls the purse-strings, it is perhaps inevitable that this unhealthy patron/client relationship will continue, with the agencies seen as merely providing a service. In the long term, however, having passive service-orientated agencies is counter-productive as far as the refugees are concerned. NGOs must begin questioning the overall direction of the operation. How long will people be stuck at the border? To what degree is our aid keeping them there? To what degree does our assistance achieve purely humanitarian goals and to what degree does it also help keep the guerrillas, dominated by the Khmer Rouge, fighting?

Traditionally the voluntary agencies, less restricted than the UN by diplomatic niceties, have been able to raise basic issues such as the above about humanitarian aid. On the Thai-Cambodian border, such work is still waiting to be done.
The Hopelessness of Camp Life

There are three main areas of concern about the border population: their legal status and abuses of their human rights; the fact they are openly used to serve a resistance movement, the main benefactors of which are the Khmer Rouge, and thirdly, their sense of hopelessness, the antithesis of what makes life worth living.

What makes the hopelessness the more remarkable and disturbing is that this has been a constant theme among writers for the past four years. Much has been written. Little has been done to resolve it.

In 1983, a medical doctor who had worked on the border in 1979 visited one of the camps. He found the situation 'much worse' than before:

'There is a hard hopelessness here, much more so than in the past. Escape is not possible. Violence and corruption are pervasive. War is certain. Fear, a sense of extreme vulnerability, is the omnipresent emotion. My experience of Samet in 1983 was overwhelmingly, searingly sad.' (42)

In December 1984, in an article entitled: "Cambodia: Ignored Victims of Faraway Policymakers", a reporter for the International Herald Tribune noted:

'On the Thai border a year's passage is marked by the hopeless cycle of war and waiting, while the world's powers are frozen in diplomatic deadlock. As the West enters its season of holiday cheer, Cambodians face another grim season of war. If the world continues to treat the people of Cambodia as instruments of policy, this will not be the last.'(43)

By 1986, Bob Maat, the most experienced aid worker on the border, who has been there since 1979, was writing of a sadness he finds in the camps:

'Maybe it is a sadness we must run from, so we lose ourselves in teaching programmes, statistical reports for UNBRO... and moving slide presentations... it is a sadness one begins to touch when one realises these people are in a no-man's-land. The sadness one witnesses in one's friend as he comes to realise Site 2 is more a prison than a refuge.

It is that dull ache one feels when one realises even good intentions can contribute to the sadness. As when one asks a five-year old girl where rice comes from and all she knows is that it comes home on her mother's head every Thursday morning from the UN rice distribution field. For that is all she has ever known since her birth into refugeehood.'
It is that sadness one must struggle with when one is with a despondent 20-year old boy who has lost two arms and an eye to a mine which he was in the process of making to blow off another’s legs.

It is in that quiet stillness that follows your chief medic’s question: ‘Do you think we are going to end up like the Palestinian refugees?’ (44)

The despair and hopelessness of a forgotten people also became a major theme of the report by Dr. Reynell, carried out in August and September 1986 to provide background information for the WFP evaluation. After an extensive visit to the three biggest camps, Sites 2 and 8 and Greenhill, she concluded:

‘Visible symptoms of psychological stress are widespread. Social workers spoke of women for whom camp life had become unbearable, who walk out of the house, leaving their children and of others who ‘retreat’ into themselves, shunning social contact. Anxiety is also high with people sharing their worries about when the next bout of shelling might start...

People find the lack of freedom very difficult to endure. They speak of feeling trapped in a cage or in jail.

The total uncertainty as to the future is particularly stressful... People increasingly are disillusioned with the ability of the resistance forces to achieve military salvation which would allow them to return to Kampuchea. This attitude is particularly common in Site 2... It was common for people to say that even to think about the future made life in the camps unendurable. Many people emphasized the hopelessness; they are just waiting to die...’ (45)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the Thai/Cambodian border there is a humanitarian crisis of international proportions. It involves the United Nations, the superpowers, countries in Asia and a number of voluntary agencies, who by their presence, have acquired a responsibility for what is happening.

Unless some of the above bodies involved take urgent action to resolve the crisis, there is a distinct danger that the present political and diplomatic paralysis will continue and the misery of the quarter of a million refugees will extend many years into the future. From a humanitarian point of view, this is totally unacceptable.

The issue of the 252,000 Cambodians on the border needs action in many quarters. The United Nations at its highest level has to start looking at the matter seriously. So far,
its public documents such as the Report of the Secretary General, 'The Situation in Kampuchea' of October 14th 1986 (already quoted), have served to obscure the tragedy with its comfortable description of the UNBRO programme. The UN's recent report, Kampuchean Humanitarian Assistance Programmes: The International Community's Response is equally uninformative (46). The good technical work done by UNBRO and the voluntary agencies is not in question. What is highly questionable is the tragic lack of diplomatic action to accompany this aid effort. As a result, the UNBRO programme is merely encouraging the problem to continue.

Many governments, including the United States, Japan, China and the EEC, are involved in supporting the border operation. They too must be encouraged to look afresh at the issue. The traditional carefully organised day-trips to the camps by government officials are no substitute for in-depth analysis - the fate of over a quarter of a million people is at stake.

In this regard the Foreign Affairs Committee's recent initiative, recommending the Government and the West in general to make reducing tension and resolving conflicts in Indo-China a policy objective, is to be welcomed (47). Further action by Her Majesty's and other governments, with specific reference to resolving the border problem, is now needed.

As far as the voluntary agencies are concerned, they too have fallen into the trap of doing good technical work on the border, without noticing that each week that goes by, life gets worse for those living there. Like the United Nations, they have a moral obligation to work for a solution. This can best be achieved by publicly raising the issue. The agencies carry power with their respective governments and should use it.

There are six main areas where action is urgently needed:

1. Urgent steps are required to resolve the legal status of the border people. Many want to return to Cambodia, and diplomatic arrangements are needed to ensure a safe and orderly return. Others may want to be resettled in a third country. Those wishing to support the resistance should no longer receive UN or NGO assistance to do so.

2. It is vital to start a system of 24 hour a day protection for people while moves to resolve their future are taken. The UN must as a priority take up the issue with the Thai government and Khmer camp leaders. The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees is probably the most appropriate UN body for this job.

Once a system of protection is set up, it will be vital for UNBRO to monitor it closely to ensure that it continues to work properly.
3. Since a permanent solution will take time to negotiate, an interim need is to move the camps away from the volatile and dangerous border to a safe distance from it, in accordance with usual UNHCR requirements for refugee camps. Again, the UN, and interested governments, would have to take this matter up at the highest levels with the Thai authorities.

4. Aid should only be given where it can be properly monitored on a regular basis. At the moment, this is not the case in four of the Khmer Rouge camps.

5. The fate of the 150,000 children under 15 years old is a particular problem.

Moves are urgently required to organise a practical education system to prepare these youngsters for an eventual return to Cambodia or for a life elsewhere. At the moment, only basic primary education is available for the vast majority of children.

6. From a humanitarian point of view, the recognition by the United Nations of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea has very serious negative consequences. It allows aid to be channeled to the border, where thousands of people live as virtual hostages in order to legitimise the Coalition. In military terms, the Coalition is dominated by the Khmer Rouge with the same leaders as during the Pol Pot years of mass murder. This represents a grave danger to the Cambodian people.

At the same time, Cambodia itself receives virtually no official development aid, again because the CGDK is the recognised government.

Breaking this diplomatic impasse is therefore an important first step. The best way of achieving this would be to have an empty seat at the United Nations. This would still allow negotiations between the non-Communist groups and the Heng-Samrin government, but would isolate the Pol Pot/Khmer Rouge faction.

The International Council for Voluntary Agencies could play an important role in the above, given its UN contacts as well as its links with many of the agencies working on the border. In the current political stalemate, with the super-powers disinterested in the issue, only the voluntary agencies can act as a voice for the refugees. I recommend that ICVA call an international conference to discuss the border situation and use its good offices to press all sides to help solve what a UN official in Bangkok called 'an unethical and immoral situation'.

* * * * * * *

TJ/mcl  June 1987

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REFERENCES


2. Linda Mason and Roger Brown, Rice, Rivalry and Politics, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London 1983, p.34. This is a fascinating account of the first years of the border camps.


4. Mason and Brown, op. cit., p.36

4a According to several international lawyers and others with whom I have spoken, the Cambodians in the camps in Thailand are 'refugees' in international law. A paper to be published in June 1987, under Quaker auspices, will give a detailed analysis of the legal status of the border population. Called 'Caught between the Gun and the Minefield: Cambodia and the Cambodians, 1979-1987', it is written by Julian Stargardt, a specialist in refugee law.


6. UNBRO correspondence, 11 November 1985

7. Mary Anne Weaver, "Refugees Return to Killing Fields", Sunday Times, 8th February 1987. For more on Ta Mok, see Evans and Rowley, op. cit., pp 108-110 and Lawyers Committee, op.cit., p.73.

8. The UNBRO "Progress Report for the Month of September 1986", notes in the section on Natrao: "On 3 September, WC and PRK (UNBRO staff) escorted Mr Lee White of CRS with a donation of 1,350 kgs of used clothing. UNBRO delivered insecticide for agriculture and stationery supplies for Khmer administration. Unfortunately, no Khmer administrators were available. As there were over 200 armed elements gathered around the meeting point, WC expressed his regrets that CRS should have to give the donation in such strange circumstances." An UNBRO official later told me that about 300 soldiers were involved.
9. Mason and Brown, op. cit., p.145


11. Dr Josephine Reynell, Socio-Economic Evaluation of the Khmer Camps on the Thai-Kampuchean Border, August/September 1986, p.69. This report was commissioned by the UN World Food Programme as part of its 1986 evaluation of UNBRO. Dr. Reynell visited the camps again in late 1986 with the full WFP evaluation team. Her revised and rewritten report will be published in May 1987. Called POLITICAL PAWNS: Refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean Border, it will be available from the Refugee Studies Programme, Queen Elizabeth House, 21 St Giles, Oxford, price £3.60 (£3.80 overseas), including postage and packing.

Another paper by Dr Reynell, "Like Chickens in a Cage", describes life in Site 2 and is also available from QEH.

12. Lawyers Committee, op. cit., p.69. The number of people wanting to escape Khmer Rouge control is undoubtedly far higher than this figure.

13. Ibid, p.70.


16. Reynell, op. cit., p.45

17. Ibid, pages 10-11 and page 25


19. CRS correspondence with UNBRO, November 21, 1986, p.4

20. Evaluation Mission Report (in draft)
21. Information Bulletin of FUNCINPEC/ANS, op. cit., page 36. One of the organizers of the sewing workshops told Dr Reynell during her visit to Greenhill in September 1986 that at that time the women were making shirts for the soldiers.

22. UNBRO official to members of the evaluation team, December 1986


25. Lawyers Committee, op.cit., pages 8-9


27. UNBRO Progress Report for the Month of September 1986, Section 3D


29. See Lawyers Committee report (op. cit.) for removals in 1985 and 1986, pages 74, 76 and 77. The figure of 1,683 civilians taken to Natrao comes from UNBRO; the 4,000 figure, in a personal communication from Filip Werbrouck.

30. In interview with the evaluation team, November 1986.


32. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Kampuchea Without Delusion, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia, 1986, page 13. Some observers claim that the border stalemate also suits Vietnam, giving it a reason to stay in Cambodia, on the grounds that otherwise the Khmer Rouge would return.

33. Foreign Affairs Committee, op. cit., page xlvi.

34. Paribatra, op. cit. page 14

35. Lawyer's Committee, op. cit., page 78.

36. Ibid., page 78.


38. Lawyers Committee, op. cit., page 78.


41. Mary Anne Weaver, "The Long Haul to Nowhere", The Sunday Times April 26th 1987 (Magazine section, pp.28-32).

42. Steve Miles, MD, report to the American Refugee Committee, 11 September 1983, page 2.


44. Bob Maat, "But Sometimes in the Middle of the Night...", Aranyaprateth, mimeo, (1986?)

45. Reynell, op. cit., page 69


47. Foreign Affairs Committee, op cit, p.xlv, Para 222(i).
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<tr>
<th>AGENCY</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>CAMP</th>
<th>AMOUNT OF UNBRO</th>
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Besides the above regular voluntary agency programmes, a number of agencies also help on an ad hoc basis, including:

- Food for the Hungry International
- Church of Christ in Thailand - for well drilling
- German Agro Action
- Japan Sotoshu Relief Committee - educational text books and educational materials; used clothing
- ZOA Refugee Care Netherlands - Khmer typewriters
- Van Leer Foundation - social welfare supplies
- Kampuchean Refugees Relief Programme - various relief supplies, including mulberry trees
- Commission for Solidarity with Indochinese Refugees: medical supplies
- Association Francaise de Solidarite - various relief supplies
- Rotary Japan - various relief supplies

The NGOs coordinated by UNBRO are a mix of large and small agencies from seven different countries: only one, COERR is from Thailand. Most of the volags are funded almost entirely by UNBRO. Only two of the 12, COERR and COR, have significant funding for their work on the border from other sources.