

MEKONG UPDATE & DIALOGUE



VOLUME 6, NUMBER 3, JULY - SEPTEMBER 2003

ISSN 1441-8355

The Australian Mekong Resource Centre

was established at the University of Sydney in 1997 to promote research, discussion and debate on development and environment issues in the Mekong Region. The AMRC is a focal point for information, dialogue and activities in support of an equitable and sustainable development path for the Mekong Region.

The *Mekong Update & Dialogue* provides:

- lead article on the key topic of the issue
- responses to the lead article
- news of current developments in the region
- news from the AMRC
- information on Mekong-related conferences and events in Australia

Contact Details

Australian Mekong Resource Centre
c/- Division of Geography
School of Geosciences (F09)
University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia
Tel: +61-2-9351 7796
Fax: +61-2-9351 8627
mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au
www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au

READER CONTRIBUTIONS

The Mekong Update & Dialogue welcomes the comments of its readers on issues raised in the Feature article and in the Responses to the Feature. If you do wish to make comment please email us at mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au. Comments should be sent by October and should be limited to 1-2 paragraphs.

EDITORIAL - Refugees

Many countries take pride in their history of providing refuge. The huddled masses of Europe who helped build the United States are an integral and heroic part of that country's history. Britain, the US and many other countries were a point of escape for Jews from Nazi Germany, providing the highest moral basis for the rightness of the Allied cause during the Second World War. That flood of refugees generated many prominent citizens who have since contributed to the scientific and cultural prowess of their host nations. Thailand and other frontline states have prided themselves on open-ness to citizens of neighbouring countries who have been forced to flee. And Australia has benefited enormously both domestically and in our international reputation and linkages through our acceptance of significant numbers of refugees from Indochina during the late 1970s and 1980s.

Yet there is a rose-tinted spectacle aspect to nations' sense of pride in their humanitarianism. However progressive a country's policy, the moment of refugee intake is almost always marked by controversy and intolerance among certain sections of the host country's society. It has taken strong leadership and a combined sense of humanity and recognition of refugees' positive cultural and economic contributions that has allowed intake policy often to fly in the face of nastier xenophobic currents.

In this issue of Mekong Update, we reflect on Australia's current refugee policy in light of the detention camps that have taken over from reception centres, and the "queue jumper" tarnish that has superseded empathy and sympathy for those who have crossed dangerous waters in leaky boats. The lead piece is by Viliam Phraxayavong, himself a former refugee who poignantly reflects on the two types of camps that interred him during the 1970s and 1980s – re-education camps in his native Laos, and holding camps in his first point of refuge, Thailand.

How has Australia shifted from a welcoming beacon of refuge to one whose first instinct is to inter refugees in a manner that embarrassingly sets us up as a shining example for those on the European far right who would like to do the same to asylum seekers in their own countries? How have we moved backward from a decade ago when our Asian neighbours recognised us as finally having broken with the historical phobic response to our geographical position in the region, to a country that is again perceived as having a fortress and neo-colonial mentality in the way we ship refugees off our vast land mass to be interred in tiny dependent Pacific island states? How have we sacrificed our internationalism in favour of a reputation for hard-headedness and inhumanity in the way we lock up children? Surely it is our leadership, not the public mood, that has gone through the more significant shift, and it is they who should reflect back on the positive lessons of previous responses in the 1930s and 1970s.

FEATURE

Today's debates on refugee policy: the case of Australia

by *Viliam Phraxayavong*

The Refugee policy of Australia is a hot "current affairs" topic in the media: radio, TV, talk-back, newspapers. Why? It is a response to the Howard Liberal government's turning back the tide towards a more discriminatory policy rather than one in favour of accepting more migrants and refugees under the UNHCR humanitarian programme. Before going further I would like to define "refugee".

Who is a refugee? A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..." (1951, United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees)

According to facts released by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) on 21 May 2003, the estimated number of persons of concern who fall under the Mandate of UNHCR as of 1 January 2002 is 19,783,100 (in Asia 8,820,700). In more than five decades, UNHCR has helped an estimated 50 million people restart their lives. Today, a staff of around 5,000 people in more than 120 countries continues to help an estimated 19.8 million persons. (<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics>).

In practice all refugees fleeing their countries of origin have been persecuted and fear being arrested and detained in prisons. They have nowhere to go and no rights whatsoever, except the one to receive charity. They know that traveling to countries of asylum will endanger their lives and that they risk not being accepted by third countries. By way of illustration, I would like to describe the fate of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the 1970s and 1980s.

When communist regimes came to power in the three countries of Indochina in early 1975, most people believed that the new leaders would work for reconciliation and national unification. On the contrary, the former government officials, the military, the police and ordinary people who did not sympathize with communism were forced into labour camps situated in remote areas far from access to communication. The Khmer fleeing the Pol Pot regime were forced to cross the border into Thailand; the Lao living along the Mekong River made risky escapes across the river. Once in Thailand they were put into illegal detention centres before the UNHR could screen and place them in UNHCR administered camps. The Vietnamese chose to flee by boat to reach Malaysia, Indonesia, Hongkong and Australia. These refugees risked attack by the pirates, storms, shortage of fuel, food and water and loss at sea.

In some countries of asylum, Indochinese refugees were dehumanized for being stateless persons. They were maltreated deliberately by officers in the detention centers, and feared sexual abuse, discrimination, depression and suicide due to the long confinement. The Thai Ministry of Interior was keen to

accept Indochinese refugees within the humanitarian program. Some detention centre authorities exerted their power in an absolute authoritarian manner to harass refugees, to exploit them, as shown by Hiem Phommachanh in his International Studies M.A. Thesis (1991, University of Sydney) where he quotes a former Lao refugee. The account mentioned that: "...at the Lao-Thai border, as part of the intimidating process, the refugees would be locked up in darkened solitary cells, or confined to special centers surrounded by barbed wire. They were deprived of the freedom of movement and subjected to constant intimidation and fear until they were able, one way or another, to raise the necessary money for bail...After the refugees had undergone a process of selection and interviews in the main UNHCR camps and had finally been accepted for resettlement in a third country, they were transported to a camp at Phanatnikhom in Chonburi Province...Even in this final transition camp, as long as they still remained on Thai soil, the refugees were regarded by Thai authorities as illegal immigrants and continued to be unjustly treated with indignity and barbarism".

As a refugee fleeing the communist regime in Lao PDR in 1984, I chose to come to Australia under the special humanitarian program. Once the Royal Thai Ministry of the Interior released the list of refugees to be interviewed by Australia, I was soon accepted with my family of five and went into the Phanat Nikhom transit centre for two months to study English and receive orientation about Australian society. We underwent health screening in preparation for departure to Australia. In Sydney, we were warmly welcomed by staff at the Villawood reception centre. My conclusion after almost 20 years of settlement in Australia has been that Australia has benefited from Indochinese refugees through their rich cultural diversity, their business-mindedness and the success of their children at school. Thus, the contribution of Indochinese refugees to Australian society has been both positive and fruitful.

Being a refugee in one's lifetime, it is hard to forget the past, particularly for someone who underwent six years of hardship in a Lao communist labour camp and in Thai refugee detention centres administered by authoritarian officers. There were some similarities between the labour camp and the detention centres in the use of repressive orders to fellow human beings who had nowhere to go and nothing in their possession except the right to breathe. Refugees had only asked to be allowed to survive and to be treated humanely. Through my experiences as a survivor of both labour and refugee camps, the refugee illegal detention centres were worse because centre officers labeled us as homeless and sub-human. Physical hardship in labour camps could be handled but the psychological torture in refugee camps followed you twenty four hours a day during detention, and even after you left the country of asylum the bad memories appeared in nightmares.

More recently, the Howard government has adopted a very different refugee policy from that of the mid 1970s and 1980s. It is widely criticized by the media. A Human Rights Watch Report entitled Not for Export has examined Australia's refugee policy since August 2001. The Report states that: "The government of Australia has taken increasingly aggressive measures in recent years to prevent unauthorized asylum seekers from reaching its shores. One year ago, on September 26, 2001, it enacted new legislation that extended the legal basis for its policies, which are among the most restrictive in the developed world. Since

RESPONSES TO FEATURE

Rekindling the spirit of the Refugee Convention

by *Andrew McGregor*

Viliam's paper provides a valuable personal account of the difficult processes, risks and hardships experienced by refugees around the world. That refugees are exposed to such hardships in Thailand, and more recently in Australia, goes against the spirit of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. When the convention was first created in 1951 the focus was on protecting the dispersed, mainly European, people uprooted by World War Two. Still reeling from the atrocities of war the international community gathered together and created a unique document that outlined the rights and responsibilities of both refugees and refugee-receiving states. Like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that preceded it, the Refugee Convention was, and still is, a remarkable achievement in international humanitarian relations.

The convention has been crucial in establishing an international consensus regarding the definition and subsequent treatment of refugees. The all-important principle of non-refoulement has provided persecuted and temporarily stateless people with a guaranteed place of refuge away from their homeland. The convention secures refugees certain rights and living standards that assist them in building new lives amidst the immense sorrow and difficulty of lives destroyed. The convention arose from the ashes of a post-world war world, from a fledging but idealistic United Nations, based on a shared concept of human dignity and humanitarian concern. It is a written international commitment to, and acknowledgement of, the existence of basic human rights.

The goodwill and lofty ideals that accompanied the convention has led to the realisation and protection of refugee rights throughout the world. Viliam's reflection on his own experiences as a Lao refugee demonstrates the importance of the convention for the humane treatment of refugees. The sometimes brutal treatment of refugees in unsanctioned Thai camps is contrasted with a period in which Australian policy was much more in tune with the spirit of the convention, oriented to helping refugees restart lives away from fear of persecution. As Viliam points out, such an approach affords benefits to both refugees and the host nation, an Australia bereft of the input from such refugees would be a much poorer place indeed.

More recently the Australian government, reflecting a general shift taking place within Western nations, has taken a much more legalistic approach to the issue of refugees. Whilst Australia should be commended for committing to accept up to 12,000 political and humanitarian refugees each year, its approach to asylum seekers from non-UN designated channels goes against the spirit in which the Refugee Convention was designed. The Tampa incident is perhaps the best known example in which the Australian government, rather than accepting and processing refugee applications, as would be encouraged by the Refugee Convention, bypassed its international obligations by diverting refugees offshore. Similar approaches can be seen in the US where the coastguard

that time, the government has sought to make its own approach the norm in the international arena". The Report went further, stating that: "Australia's refugee policy has been shaped by efforts to deter refugees, most of them Afghans and Iraqis, from arriving in Australia without their first applying for resettlement via the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or an Australian diplomatic post." (<http://www.hrw.org/press> September 2002).

Prime Minister John Howard says there will be no change to the Government's refugee policy due to Australian involvement in Iraq. Mr. Howard says Australia will play its part and accept a number of refugees along with the rest of the international community. But he says there will be no change to the admission rules. "There's no change to our policy and that is that [when] people seek admission to Australia as a refugee they have to go through the channels, and I'm quite certain that if there is a refugee surge which I doubt will occur it will be in the other direction I really do," he said. In the last three years just over 4,000 Iraqis have been granted temporary protection visas in Australia. (<http://www.abc.net.au> March 19, 2003).

Asylum seekers arriving from Iraq and Afghanistan by way of Indonesia who were in the Woomera detention centre claimed that their human rights were being abused by the Woomera (privately run) administration. This has similarities to Nongkhai, Napho and Ban Vinai refugee detention centres where stateless people were dehumanized as if they were in hell. Australia needs more migrants and refugees but, as global politics has changed significantly since the 1970s and 1980s, the Australian government has reversed its refugee policy to respond to short-term political issues rather than looking at the humanitarian issues that affect the world. As a former refugee, I ask myself whether this is a direction toward a better Australia.

Viliam Phraxayavong is an AMRC Associate who is undertaking PhD research on the impacts of foreign assistance on rural development in the Lao PDR.



Children behind bars at Port Hedland Detention Centre, Western Australia. (Source: Children out of Detention)

vigorously patrols its waters hoping to ward off potential refugees from Latin America, or in England's continual lobbying of France to install greater security to prevent Middle Eastern asylum-seeking Channel runners. Rather than engaging in the spirit of the convention Western nations are increasingly adopting an attitude of prevention rather than rehabilitation.

One difficulty often cited by Western nations is distinguishing between economic migrants, who are not covered in the convention, and genuine refugees. The Australian government has preferred an approach that seeks to ultimately only accept refugees who have been identified as such by the United Nations. Distinguishing between refugees and economic migrants that arrive through non-UN channels has proved to be an expensive, time consuming, and now extremely political process. The 'Pacific Solution' engendered by the Tampa crisis has been popularly presented to the Australian public as a way of keeping out unsolicited asylum seekers, minimising Australia's international obligations. It appears that Australian self-interest and domestic politics is superseding the humanitarian ideals of the Refugee Convention.

In addition to the Pacific Solution a second strategy to deter potential refugees revolves around the highly publicised deterioration of refugee detention centre conditions within Australia. Claims of human rights abuses, degrading treatment and slow processing of refugee claims have led to internal riots, hunger strikes and voluntary repatriation as frustration with detention conditions escalates. Such conditions again go against the spirit of the convention whereby refugees are to be granted the same rights as any other foreign nationals living in the country. Some of these rights are clearly not being met, such as the right outlined within the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that children should only be detained as a last resort, not automatically as in the current situation. The poor conditions within the detention centres, and the subsequent expressions of frustration, combined with the border protection activities, are attempts at minimising any appeal Australia may have had for unsolicited refugees and economic migrants alike.

In the same way that Viliam recalled Thailand's implicit discouragement of Laotian refugees through exploitation and poor treatment, Australia is similarly discouraging non-solicited refugees through mistreatment and displacement. Somewhat ironically, the Refugee Convention that was designed to protect refugees, has become embedded in Australian politics and given rise to a dangerous and discriminatory politics focused upon ensuring unsolicited refugees don't reach Australia, thereby alleviating Australia's international obligations. A return to the idealism that first accompanied the Refugee Convention, an idealism centred on assisting, rather than avoiding, these most marginalised of people, is desperately needed in Australia and elsewhere. The spirit of the convention, to protect those living in fear of persecution, should not give way to a pragmatism that perpetuates such fears, but in a different context, in order to avoid international human rights obligations.



Karen refugees in Burma hiking to the Thai border where they will try to gain entrance to one of the refugee camps. (Source: Burma Issues)



Tham Hin refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. (Source: Burma Issues)

NEWS FROM THE REGION

Proposed Mekong power grid

A campaign is gearing up to oppose plans by the ADB and World Bank for a regional power grid and electricity trading system for the six Mekong countries - China, Burma, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Vietnam. The Mekong power grid is a core component of the ADB's Greater Mekong Subregion program. The proposal gained momentum last November when the six Mekong states signed an Inter-governmental Agreement on Regional Power Trade. Hydropower development would receive a new lease of life and spur on controversial projects such as the joint venture between EGAT (Thailand) and the Burmese government for the construction of two large dams on the Salween River in Burma. IRN has published a briefing paper on the issues at <http://www.irn.org/programs/mekong/030620.powergrid-bp.pdf>

Kultida Samabuddhi 2003 "Cabinet gives green light for ratification of power accord", Bangkok Post, 5 June 2003

IRN 2003 "Trading away the future: the Mekong power grid", IRN Briefing Paper, June 2003

Dams update

Se San dams

Construction of the Plei Krong hydropower dam (capacity 110MW) on the Se San River, upstream of the contentious Yali Falls dam in the central highlands of Vietnam, is to start later this year. Some 2,500 people (mostly ethnic minorities) will be resettled. In 2002 EVN (Electricity of Vietnam Corporation) began work on Se San 3 dam (260MW), downstream of Yali Falls. Other dams along the Se San River are still in the planning phase.

--- "Another power plant to be built for Central Highlands", VNA 28 May 2003

Lancang dams

Of the eight dams eventually forming the Lancang River Cascade project in Yunnan, two are already in operation and one is under construction. Another, Jinghong dam (capacity 1,500MW) is to be started later this year, earlier than anticipated. The estimated cost of the dam is 10.04 billion yuan and the construction time is expected to be just under seven years. (See MU&D 5.3 for background on Lancang hydropower issues.)

--- "Construction on Jinghong to start by end of 2003", Xinhua News Agency, 3 June 2003

Mining issues

Lead mine poisoning in western Thailand

Karen communities in western Thailand are being poisoned by toxic discharge from lead mines which have been in operation over the past forty years. People are suffering from acute lead poisoning, sometimes leading to death, from drinking, fishing and washing in the local watercourse. In addition, the lead mines are contaminating the water resources of World Heritage listed Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary. Despite a government study in 1995 and the forced (temporary) closure of one of the lead mines, polluted waste has yet to be cleaned up. Moreover,

the government has not provided any substantial assistance to affected villagers.

Rajesh, N. 2003 "Deadly lead mines poisoning ethnic communities", WRM Bulletin 71, June 2003

Limestone mining threatens karst landscapes

Vietnam is famous for its spectacular limestone karst landscapes. In 1998 a new cement plant - now known as Holcim (Vietnam) Ltd - was established in Hon Chong, Kien Giang province, south-west Vietnam near the Cambodian border. The project is a joint venture with a Swiss cement company. Holcim intends to quarry three nearby limestone mountains to feed its cement plant. An inadequate EIA was produced in 1995 for these ecologically significant limestone sites. Despite protests, Holcim has been insensitive to the damage limestone quarrying has inflicted on the karst landscape and continues to extract 4,000 tons of limestone a day from the three mountains.

Lang, C. 2003 "Unique biodiversity threatened by World Bank-funded cement plant", WRM Bulletin 71, June 2003

AUSTRALIAN MEKONG NEWS

Update on two AMRC projects

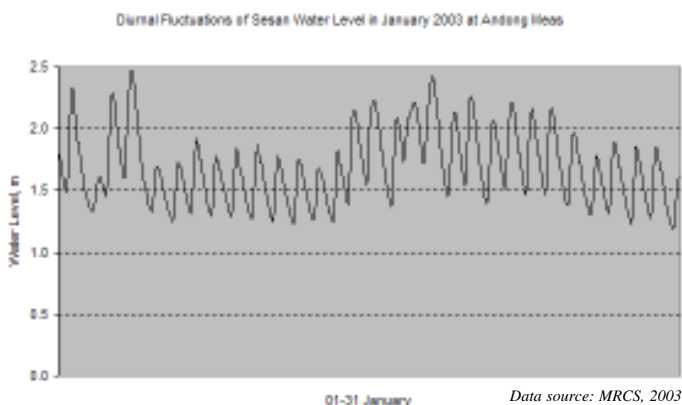
1. Mekong Delta, Vietnam

Collaboration with the Department of Environment and Natural Resource Management at Can Tho University on a 3-year Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project headed by Philip Hirsch entitled *'Toward a Political Ecology of Risk in River Basin Development: The Case of the Mekong'* has begun with a recent visit to a possible case study site on Long Hoa Island, Tra Vinh Province. Long Hoa Island is in many ways a microcosm of the much larger water resources development projects on mainland Tra Vinh Province, such as the World Bank/National Government funded South Mang Thit project. As at South Mang Thit, large-scale water control infrastructure is being constructed/expanded to control flooding and salinity intrusion in order to extend rice growing areas and seasons. However the profitability of rice growing has declined in recent times in comparison to cultivated shrimp farming leading to major land-use changes that are at odds with installed water control infrastructure primarily designed to facilitate rice growing. This component of the ARC project seeks to examine the diverse perceptions of and responses to risks to livelihoods in the context of economic, ecological and infrastructure developments in the Mekong Delta as part of a wider study of the dynamic and complex nature of risk in the Lancang-Mekong Basin.

2. Sesan River, Cambodia

On 9 May, as a part of AMRC's support for the Sesan Protection Network which is being conducted through the BothEnds project that is seeking to document bottom-up negotiated approaches to river basin development, Andrew Wyatt joined

the Sesan Protection Network in Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia, for a celebratory meeting commemorating the Network's formation last year. Although the Network is relatively new, the livelihood related struggles of the Sesan villagers date back at least 7 years since the flows of the Sesan River began to be managed by the construction and operation of the Yali Falls hydropower dam in Vietnam (see AMRC case study at http://www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au/case_studies/sesan/). At the commemorative meeting attended by several hundred people, the Governor of Ratanakiri Province in his opening speech stated that he had informed the Vietnamese authorities that operation of the Yali Falls dam was continuing to cause rapid daily fluctuations in river flow and water levels, and that this was causing serious difficulties for the people of Ratanakiri. Indeed, recent data obtained from the Mekong River Commission Secretariat attest to the managed flows that are causing such serious impacts to the river's ecology and the livelihoods of over 50,000 indigenous peoples in Ratanakiri Province and Stung Treng Province. The following figure provides some idea of the magnitude of river level fluctuation, varying between 0.5 m to over 1 m on a diurnal cycle, at an MRCS hydrology station (Andong Meas) some 110 kms downstream of Yali Falls hydropower dam.



To date, there has been no effective official response to the Ratanakiri Governor's pleas and that of the Sesan Protection Network for a solution, as the evidence above demonstrates.

Andrew Wyatt

MRC Fisheries Programme annual meeting

Associate Simon Bush represented the AMRC at the Annual Meeting of the MRC Fisheries Programme for Fisheries Management and Development Cooperation. The meeting was held 4-5 June in Udon Thani. The meeting was attended by a range of regional partner organisations of the MRC including WWF, AIT, NACA, IUCN and SEAFDEC. The meeting reported on the many changes that the Programme underwent in 2002, including major restructuring and a reduction in funding. Most notable was a reduction in external technical input and greater emphasis on the Technical Advisory Board (TAB) and riparian partner agencies. Restructuring of the Programme saw two of the previous components, Capture Fisheries Management of Cambodia and the Management of Reservoir Fisheries, combined into the Management of River and Reservoir Fisheries component. The Aquaculture of Indigenous Mekong Fish Species and Assessment of Mekong Capture Fisheries components remain as before.

The two day meeting produced some interesting discussion over the current assessment and status of Mekong fisheries. With regard to future activities the delegates from the four riparian National Mekong Committees expressed support for strengthening inland fisheries information systems, co-management activities and mainstreaming gender issues. The meeting also saw the departure of Ms. Jeanineke Dahl Kristensen, the manager of the Programme for the last two years, and the appointment to the post of Dr. Chris Barlow from Australia who emphasised the importance of consolidating the strengths of the Fisheries Programme and sharing the information already collected with a wider audience of stakeholders through a variety of media.

Simon Bush

Joint project on water strategies

AMRC is currently conducting a small project with Oxfam CAA to investigate the linkages between water-related research, advocacy and program activities both in Australia and the Mekong Region. This is a strategic exercise to identify key areas for applied and action research in river basin management and integrated water resources management in the future. The origin of this project lies in a recognition that while there is an increasing number of projects and policy initiatives that either directly or indirectly address water or river basin development issues, opportunities for learning between different regions and organisations were not being fully realised.

The aim is to take a snapshot of what research, advocacy and program work is being conducted by different organisations, including OCAA, research organisations and some of OCAA and AMRC's partners in Australia. The project will attempt to map who is doing what, but will also identify what linkages exist or could be strengthened between the three areas of research, advocacy and program work. Building on this, and an analysis of critical water issues, the aim is to strategically analyse the linkages between research - advocacy - program work, and identify key areas for future research and opportunities to support the work of organisations who share common interests in water issues.

Fiona Miller

Pune meeting on river basin management

All the project partners from the *Integrated river basin management: a negotiated approach* project participated at a week-long meeting and series of field visits in and around Pune, India from 15-21 June 2003. The meeting was an important half-way mark in a challenging program to document ways in which grassroots groups have been upscaling their work and addressing challenges in a diverse set of river basin contexts. A number of Indian activists addressed the group, including Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement). The meeting made significant progress in comparing case study experience from Latin America, Africa and South and Southeast Asia, also developing key project themes of negotiation and participation, upscaling, gender, appropriate technologies and ecosystem approaches in river basin management. AMRC partners from Sesan and Nan River Basins played an active part in the meeting. Two field visits to the Bhima River Basin looked at how Gomukh, the host of the meeting, has been working with

local communities over two decades to develop small-scale alternatives in response to their critique of large scale dam construction and river diversion. An important remaining task for the project is to compile the individual and collective experience of the partners in a way that has the potential to influence policy-makers and to effect more sustainable and socially just outcomes.

Phil Hirsch

Politics of the Commons conference

From 11-14 July 2003, the Regional Social Science Centre for Sustainable Development at Chiangmai University hosted a conference on *Politics of the Commons: articulating development and negotiating local practices*. AMRC provided organisational support for the conference, and was represented by Phil Hirsch, Andrew Wyatt and Nattaya Tubtim, together with several postgraduate and honours students, and several participants with previous associations with the Centre. The Conference doubled as a regional meeting of the International Association for the Study of Common Property, but participants came from all corners of the globe. Nevertheless, there was a strong Mekong focus.

The original idea for a medium-scale workshop ballooned into a major conference with more than 200 papers and 300 participants. The main unifying theme was that common property issues are embedded in a range of political agendas, even when they concern quite local scale common property resources. Phil Hirsch hosted a Mekong Roundtable and was also co-organiser of one of the five thematic panels, on trans-national discourses on commons management. The conference involved a combination of plenary presentations, including a rabble-rousing opening speech by Nancy Peluso (Berkeley) based around the social justice agendas in the commons, and smaller panel sessions. Conference proceedings were arranged on CD-ROM by RCSD.

Phil Hirsch

UPCOMING EVENTS

EMECS 2003: the 6th International Conference on the Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas

18-21 November 2003, Bangkok, Thailand

Contact: EMECS 2003 Secretariat,
c/o Environmental Research Institute,
Chulalongkorn University, Patumwan,
Bangkok, Thailand 10330

Tel. +66-2218-2110

Fax. +66-2218-8124

E-Mail : secretariat@emecs2003.com

<http://www.emecs2003.com>

International Conference: Research on Water in Agricultural Production in Asia for the 21st Century

25-28 November 2003, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Contact: Mr. Chea Marong

Cambodian Agricultural Research and Development
Institute (CARDI) Conference Secretary

Telephone: (855-23) 219693

Fax: (855-23) 219800

E-mail: CARDIConference@online.com.kh

2nd International Meeting on Dams, Rivers and People

28 November - 3 December 2003, Rasi Salai, Thailand

Contact: Aviva Imhof

International Rivers Network

1847 Berkeley Way

Berkeley, CA 94703 USA

tel: 510-848-1155 fax: 510-848-1008

email: aviva@irn.org

<http://www.irn.org/index.html>

The events listed above are changed with each issue of Mekong Update & Dialogue. For a complete list of upcoming events please go to our website at www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au. For submission of new events please contact the AMRC Administrator at mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au

ME NAM :: Rivers is an exciting photography exhibition to celebrate waterways and community activism to protect them, in Australia and in the Asia Pacific Region.

PUBLIC LAUNCH: host speaker Peter Garrett, President of the Australian Conservation Foundation

WHERE: NSW Parliament House, Jubilee Room, Macquarie St, Sydney

WHEN: Tuesday, October 14 - 2003

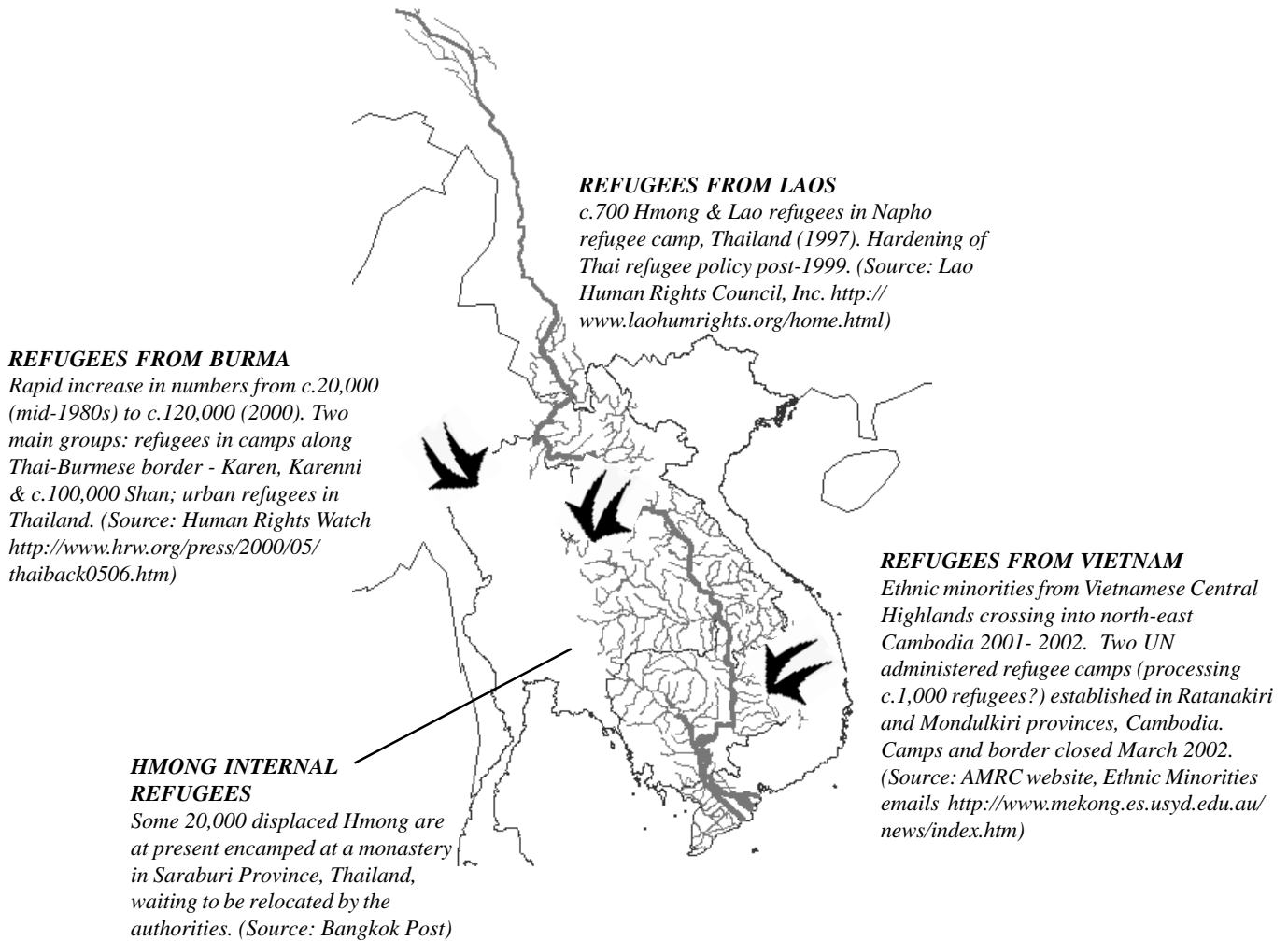
TIME: 7.00 pm

CONTACT: Antonella Biscaro at AID/WATCH on 02 9557 8944

Exhibition will run October 7 - 17, 2003. Weekdays 9.00 am - 4.30 pm



REFUGEE HOT-SPOTS IN THE MEKONG



Australian Mekong Resource Centre
C/-Division of Geography
School of Geosciences
University of Sydney NSW 2006
Australia