

Thailand: Rock Star Sings “For Refugees,” Legislators and Donor Discuss Alternatives to Warehousing

In August, Aed Carabao, lead singer in what Wikipedia calls “the most popular Thai rock group of all time,” composed an original song, “For Refugees,” about warehousing in Thailand and how Thais should do something about it:

[Spoken Introduction]

Everyone should dare to dream, no matter whether it is small or big. We have only one life in this world. If we remain idle, our life is meaningless and wasted. But if we have a dream, and

chase it, our life is exciting and challenging. ... There are many who would like to dream, but cannot because they are refugees. ... Some spent their whole life in the camps. Some died, others had children. None have the chance to go out or to do anything that makes their lives better. They are detained like prisoners. Their situation is even worse than that of prisoners sentenced to life as the latter can regain freedom with an amnesty, but refugees can't. If we look with humanity, this is cruel. ... But if we recognize that they are human beings, our companions in the world who deserve equal rights, and that they could share with us their potential economically and in many other ways, if we help them and give them more rights than we do now, then they could contribute to the development of Thailand or any other country.

[For Refugees]

I. If one does not stay among the suffering, how can he feel it?
But just seeing them with eyes and heart, I feel ashamed.
As peoples standing after us are all fraternal, bonded by clans,
Their homeland was invaded, destroyed by war.

II. They fled to safe haven and became refugees without any rights, but being men
Spending day after day, meaninglessly without purpose.
But there is still hope and belief that the life of every human being has dignity.
Not giving up to fate, they are not impoverished.

* Life with freedom is the right that every human being should enjoy from birth.
Freedom is what everyone yearns for, and wants to have, not refugee camps.
Displaced peoples living along the fringe of the Thai border have feelings and want freedom.
I want to let the world know through this song that refugees, no matter where they are from, are also human beings.

III. This is a plea for my Thai brothers and sisters to be aware of the situation of refugees.



Aed Carabao sings “For Refugees.” For link to music video, go to www.refugees.org/warehousing/thailand. Credit: USCRI

Hundreds of thousands who are still waiting with hope wait for your sympathy to push policy forward
 To see the importance of displaced peoples, to allow them to have life's freedom as human beings.
 Life with freedom is the life that every human being should enjoy from birth.
 Freedom that every one of us searches for; which is the right more than...
 The right of being just refugees.



Member of Parliament Jumphot Bunyai and Senator Tuang Untachai discuss alternatives to warehousing. Credit: USCRI

On national television in November, Carabao offered a rendition, provoking discussion among a panel including Senator Tuang Untachai of the Senate Human Rights Commission, Member of Parliament Jumphot Bunyai, and the representative of the European Commission in Thailand, Jean-François Cautain. Here are translations of some excerpts:



European Commission representative Jean-François Cautain: EC will support pilot projects. Credit: USCRI

Carabao: I am interested in this issue as I think that we in the region are fraternal. Their homeland is in turmoil, and they could not live there as their lives and property might be in danger. Our country just labels them refugees who are allowed to stay temporarily. Such so-called temporary stay may mean living here for entire lives or for seven generations. I would deliver the matter to Thai people who are sympathetic to peoples' lives, who love rights and freedom, so that they should echo to the state that refugees should have better opportunities, as other human beings have, and that the refugees are not guilty of crimes and therefore should not be imprisoned this way.

Jumphot: The children [of the Indochinese refugees during the Dien Bien Phu war] assimilated in Thai society without any danger or problems and these people are economically productive... Warehoused refugees, on the other hand, always depend on rations or aid from governments. They cannot use their skills. I think if we allow warehoused refugees to work, there will be no problems or fewer problems than by confining them to camps. It will even benefit security: integrated refugees will have a positive perspective towards Thailand and

when they return their homeland, they will continue having a good relationship with us.

Cautain: We have been spending 45 million Euro per year. My organization, the EU, has spent 50 percent of the total funding to support for education, health, and training in the camps. But at the same time, we see that families have lived in camps for 20 years. They don't see a future and we don't see the situation [leading to] a sustainable solution. ... [I]f you look over the world, there are lessons learned from other countries: refugees around the world with good education and opportunities in their life contribute to the host countries. So to give them better education and job opportunities, I think it will be very good for Thailand. ... [I]f these people are registered to work in any parts of the country, then it will be much more secure than now as the people are sneaking out to the labor market. ... We have discussed with Thai government that we would like Thailand to start pilot project to allow refugees to work outside the camps in any parts of the country. ... [W]e have been spending a lot of money in Thailand for 20 years. Part of the funding could be spent for other solutions. One of them could be to fund pilot projects for refugees to work in Thailand.