

INVOLUNTARY Returns and Expulsions - 2003

INVOLUNTARY The Refugee Convention prohibits governments from forcibly returning refugees to places where they would be persecuted (*refoulement*). Governments rarely *refoule* persons they acknowledge to be refugees. More commonly, they forcibly return people who have been denied access to a fair refugee determination procedure, whether they arrive by land, are interdicted at sea, or are turned back at airports. Not all listed here are refugees, but these are some of the more egregious cases of return or expulsion under circumstances that could result in *refoulement*. It is not a comprehensive list, so no total is provided. For further information, see the Regional Summaries and Country Updates.

Thailand deported about 120,000 Myanmar—delivering about 4,800 directly to Myanmar authorities, including 120 Karen refugees associated with the resistance who held UNHCR identification documents. Those deported informally were not screened but included pro-democracy activists, labor rights organizers, and members of persecuted ethnic minorities.

Iran deported approximately 16,000 un-registered Afghans despite the fact that Iran and UNHCR had granted *prima facie* refugee status to more than 2 million other Afghans in the country.

Venezuela Security forces said they expelled more than 15,000 undocumented Colombians, half of whom may be asylum seekers, because the country lacked an asylum system sufficient to handle the more than 182,000 refugees in the country.

China forcibly returned about 7,800 North Korean refugees and denied UNHCR access to more than 100,000. North Korea typically punishes persons who left illegally with several months forced labor in prison camps. Those who met with Christians or South Koreans while abroad, may be executed.

United States forcibly returned some 2,000 Haitians and 1,600 Cubans. Referring to the Haitians, President Bush boldly

flouted international law by proclaiming in February 2004: “We will turn back any refugee that attempts to reach our shore.”

Yemen repatriated 1,200 Ethiopians intercepted at sea and arrested and repatriated more than 500 others of Arab and other nationalities that tried to enter Yemen.

Malaysia In August, police blocked the entrance to UNHCR’s office in Kuala Lumpur and arrested nearly 300 mostly Acehese asylum seekers from Indonesia, causing UNHCR to close its office. In September the police raided a camp near Limau Manis and arrested about 400 more. Authorities forcibly returned about 600 during the year.

Bangladesh reportedly used imprisonment, eviction, seizure of food and medicine ration books, as well as threats of physical attack to force hundreds of Rohingya to return to Myanmar.

Panama forcibly repatriated more than a hundred Colombian refugees including some it had earlier granted Temporary Humanitarian Status.

Nepal forcibly returned 18 Tibetans to China in May, including 8 children. At the end of the year, the Nepalese border police forcibly returned another 21 Tibetans to China. (In October, China executed a Uighur with refugee status whom Nepal had earlier deported.)



Photo: Malaysian authorities deport Indonesians in March 1998. Malaysia conducted mass arrests and forcibly repatriated about 600 ethnic Acehese to Indonesia in 2003. Credit: AP/S. Thinakaran