

Christmas in the Jungle – January 3, 2008

Dear friends,

This is an account of my Christmas this year:

I've always wanted to go see my people in the IDP camps near River Salween, this in fact, has been one in my top concern to be with the Internally Displaced people in the Eastern jungle of Karen state along the Burma-Thai border. My heart aches when i think of them running and hiding in the jungle.

My dream to be with them had come true when I received a call from my friend David, An American Missionary from Mae Hong Son, that we would go to Site Six (Oo Wai Klo) to celebrate Christmas out there. I quickly cancelled my speaking engagements, one on the 24th, another on the 25th and that one on the 27th too. This had been a long proposed trip to the newly established IDP camp.

In Maela where I live, none of us will have to worry for our daily food, our clothes, shoes or some other basic needs.

We are quite complacent now out here and I feel guilty sometimes not being able to do much for our brothers and sisters out there panting and fuming for their survival. Most of us do almost nothing at all except praying for them from time to time.

I wanted to go and say this -- that they are not forgotten and that we care for them. Just that.

Oo wai Klo is a valley and a jungle. Children hardly have any place to play. In fact, they have one narrow very rocky strip they cleaned up to play soccer. I thought they might have kicked more rocks than kicking footballs while playing.

Kids where i live have some sort of mini-amusement park of some sort where they can swing, climb up and down those Iron railings built by some NGOs; many houses have TVs and they have a lot to toy with and thus when it comes to worship, praises, prayers, Bible studies, they have very very less interest to participate.

In contrast, children in Oo Wei Klo don't have those worldly comforts but God is so really to them. When I grabbed my guitar to sing, a hundred of them assembled in a matter of 5 minutes to hear me sing. I had an impression that they might listen the whole night if i could continue to sing that long.

Early this year when these people left their villages to come toward the border, the Thai's authority told Rangoon that there has been some people from Burma who are yet trying to cross over to the Thailand side for refuge. (They are held up on the Salween Bank, the Thai did not allow their cross over.) Rangoon as usual, denied the existence of such a thing flat out. So I was told Bangkok had to send some delegations to do some frontier inquiries and that the 400 people are no ghosts that walk. Some 70 more people are on their way to Oo Wei Klo and are expected to arrive shortly after December 25th.

Oo Wei Klo was sure happy that we celebrated Christmas with them (distribute clothes, oranges, Bibles and hymnals that we brought along as tokens of Christmas gifts to them). for they decided to declare Christmas day as holiday, that means they would not celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ for lack of spiritual leaders to organize the event and for lack of resources to celebration.

These people's future hanged in the air. Like Maela camp they might think they will be there for a few months, things will get better and they go back home. It is not like that. The truth is we thought we will be a few months in Maela and now we are running into the 18th year as refugees. They need prayers, they need warm clothes, they need food, yes food, they need proper shelters, they need spiritual leaders, they need education etc... I don't know about other people but i want to focus my effort for these people and for those who have yet to arrived.

May the true joy of Christmas be with you all.

Sincerely yours,
Wado