

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

1. **Where is Khon Kaen?**
2. **What is required to convert from Buddhism to Islam and vice versa?**
3. **What level of police protection is available to women in Thailand?**
4. **Please provide information regarding relocation for women who are facing violence from their husband/family?**

RESPONSE

1. Where is Khon Kaen?

Khon Kaen is a province located in north-eastern Thailand. It is said to be the second-largest province in the north-east region with a city population of 150,000 ('Khon Kaen Province' 2006, Wikipedia website, 12 November http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khon_Kaen_Province – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 1; 'Welcome to Khon Kaen, Thailand' (undated), KhonKaen.com website <http://www.khonkaen.com/> – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 2).

A map of Thailand provided at Attachment 3 illustrates the position of Khon Kaen province. Attachment 4 illustrates the province and its districts ('Thailand (Administrative Divisions)' 2005, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas website http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/thailand_admin_2005.jpg – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 3; 'Map of Khon Kaen Province' (undated), KhonKaen.com website <http://www.khonkaen.com/english/maps/prov750.asp> – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 4).

2. What is required to convert from Buddhism to Islam and vice versa?

In an academic paper for The University of Münster, Germany, author Nishii Ryoko describes the prevalence of interfaith marriages between Muslims and Buddhists in Southern Thailand. Ryoko states that “People of different religions usually cannot live in the same house... one of the partners has to convert”. Though the author’s study is confined to Southern Thailand, no conflicting information was found to suggest that the provinces of Northern Thailand differ. The pertinent extracts follow in detail.

Elsewhere in this border region intermarriages, which are rare, are not commonly accompanied by conversion of one of the partners. At other places on the east coast of Southern Thailand or in northern Malaysia, in the few reported cases of conversion connected with intermarriage, the Buddhist has always converted to Islam. In the frequency of intermarriage, the acceptability of conversion, and the fact that the conversion can go either way, Islam to Buddhism or Buddhism to Islam, this village is highly distinctive.

...Buddhists are regarded as Muslims when they convert to Islam by shahada (reciting the words of faith). If the Buddhist partner does not recite the words of faith, the other partner is regarded as a Buddhist. In other words, the religious boundary is delineated only by reference to Islam. In daily life, villagers usually regard those who go to mosque as Muslims and those who go to temple as Buddhists [Researcher emphasis]. After marriage, converts cannot live with their parents who are of different religion. This religious boundary limits the elasticity of cognatic kinship relations (Ryoko, N. (undated), ‘A way of Negotiating with the other within the self: Muslim’s acknowledgement of Buddhist ancestors in Southern Thailand’, The University of Münster website http://www.uni-muenster.de/Ethnologie/South_Thai/working_paper/Nishii_Negotiation.pdf – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 5).

3. What level of police protection is available to women in Thailand in relation to the threat of family violence?

Domestic violence and the lack of police protection remains a serious problem for women in Thailand. Despite efforts by the government and non-government organisations (NGOs), abuses still exist within the context of cultural norms. Several reports state that domestic violence is under-reported due to the perception that it is a private matter to be resolved by the family themselves (Wongtavavimarn, K. 2005, ‘Making the home a safe place for women’, *Bangkok Post*, 17 October – Attachment 6).

RRT Research Response THA30762 provides a thorough examination of domestic violence in Thailand and the level of police protection available to victims (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response THA30762*, 31 October – Attachment 7). Of special interest is a 2006 report by Elayne Clift for the human rights organisation Toward Freedom, which discusses the first World Health Organisation (WHO) study on domestic violence and Thailand’s pending domestic violence law. In relation to police protection in Thailand the report states:

The police, known for ignoring and trivializing domestic violence in Thailand, are vested with near total power over complaints and judges have the authority to decide on measures they think will keep the family together. Reconciliation and out of court settlements are encouraged (Clift, E. 2006, ‘A Timely Study Highlights Violence Against Thai Women’, Toward Freedom website, 4 January http://towardfreedom.com/home/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=718&Itemid=61&pop=1&page=0 - Accessed 27 October 2006 – Attachment 8).

A 2006 article by *The Nation* in Thailand states the following regarding domestic violence against women:

Violence against women is on the increase, yet in many countries, amazingly, it is not considered a crime. In Thailand a woman at the receiving end of domestic violence is usually too ashamed to ask for help from her family. The neighbours are simply not interested and the police, when called in, are unwilling to help because, they say, it's a private problem.

Domestic violence is not limited to low-income households where the squabbles can be "excused" by frustrations over money. In today's cutthroat society, a married woman with a successful career, children and an upscale condo is as likely to be on the receiving end of blows as a common-law wife living in the slums ('Ending the Violence' 2006, *The Nation*, 25 March – Attachment 9).

Khon Kaen Province

Several sources state that Khon Kaen is notorious for its sex trade and for having a high level of reported domestic violence. In 2001 The Foundation for Women (FFW), a Thai NGO based in Bangkok, established an education project within colleges to highlight the problem of violence against women in four cities known as "major sites of the sex trade". Khon Kaen was one of the cities along with Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Songkla ('Organizations Addressing VAW' 2001, United Nations Development Fund for Women website, 22 November <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/index.htm> – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 10).

In March 2006, the 'International Conference on Population and Development in Asia' was held in Thailand. In a paper by Montri Pekan, Khon Kaen is described as having a high level of domestic violence "according to reports from police and social welfare officers" (Pekanan, M. 2006, 'Abstract: Promotion of Male Responsibility on Protection of Domestic Violence against Women and Children', Asian MetaCentre website, 20-22 March http://www.populationasia.org/Events/2006/Population_and_Development_in_Asia_2006/Abstracts/montri%20pekanan.pdf – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 11).

The results of a qualitative study on domestic violence in Khon Kaen province conducted in 2004 by Nagoya University's School of Medicine highlighted that "a legal framework against DV has yet to be established and government agencies are not greatly involved in DV interventions" (Nagae, M. et al. 2004, 'Domestic violence as a women's health issue--activities of health professionals in Thailand', PubMed website, April http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=15162975&dopt=Abstract – Accessed 22 November 2006 – Attachment 12).

4. Please provide information regarding relocation for women who are facing violence from their husband/family?

While no information was found on relocation in Thailand, there exists a network of government and non-government organisations providing welfare services for victims of domestic violence. *Research Response THA30762* describes some of the various services available to women and their families who are fleeing violence in the home. However, it is important to note that "these services reportedly suffer from serious budgetary constraints. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the issue of domestic violence seems to attract

considerably less attention both from government and non-government agencies – both locally and internationally – than does the endemic problem of sex trafficking of Thai women and children” (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response THA30762*, 31 October – Attachment 7).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. ‘Khon Kaen Province’ 2006, Wikipedia website, 12 November
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khon_Kaen_Province – Accessed 22 November 2006.
2. ‘Welcome to Khon Kaen, Thailand’ (undated), KhonKaen.com website
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