

Refugee Returnees, Govt Reach Housing Agreement

By Tin Htet Paing | The Irrawaddy | 5 December 2016



One of the recent returnees is sitting in front of the warehouse of the Relief and Resettlement Department's Rangoon office in Mayangone Township in Nov. 2016/ Hein Htet/ The Irrawaddy

RANGOON — After one month of negotiations, Rangoon refugee returnees recently repatriated from Thailand have come to an agreement with the government for a lower upfront payment to purchase housing.

Since [arriving](#) in the country's commercial capital, the 17 former refugees—belonging to four families—have been provided temporary shelter at a warehouse run by the Relief and Resettlement Department's Rangoon office in Mayangone Township while waiting for the regional government to arrange long-term accommodation.

Last week, the returnees proposed that they would pay 1 million kyats (US\$761) up front for housing and the rest over eight years to purchase apartments for 9.8 million kyats (\$7,463) in the Shwe Linn Ban Industrial Zone in Rangoon's Hlaing Tharyar Township. The refugees refused the divisional government's plan that they initially be responsible for paying 30 percent of the total cost of the spaces.

U Soe Aung, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement, told The Irrawaddy that the Rangoon regional cabinet and his minister had decided to honor the returnees' request for a lower up-front payment.

"They have requested that we consider this proposal since they have financial difficulties," he said.

However, based on individual families' circumstances, upfront payments will vary from one to four million kyats, U Win Shwe, a director at the relief and resettlement department in Rangoon, explained.

The Irrawaddy talked to some of the returnees on Monday and learnt that U Thant Zin Maung, whose wife suffers from muscular atrophy in her legs, would purchase a ground-floor apartment

with a down payment of 4 million kyats, while U Aye Lwin, a father of six, said he would choose the cheapest available apartment with a down payment of 1 million kyats.

Daw Khin San Yee, one of the returnees and a former political prisoner, said that the families are now waiting to sign a contract for the purchases with the government's Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development.

She also said that next step for the returned families will be to find appropriate jobs to earn a living once accommodation has been settled.

"We must have jobs now," said Daw Khin San Yee. "We have to feed ourselves and pay for the purchased house with our earnings."

The 17 Rangoon returnees are among the first batch of 65 returnees who were repatriated to Burma via the Myawaddy-Mae Sot Friendship Bridge from the Nu Po camp on the Thai-Burma border in late October. Arrangements for the move were made by the governments of Thailand and Burma, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), and the International Organization for Migration.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement currently provided 3,000 kyats (US\$2.33) to each returnee to contribute to daily living expenses. Each family has received 300,000 kyats (US\$230) from the Union government, and the Thai government offered 8,300 baht (\$233) per adult and 6,500 baht (\$182) per child before leaving Thailand.