



World Refugee Day 2024 – Commemoration and Event

20.06.2024

WEAVE Quality Control Centre Karenni Site 1, Ban Mai Nai Soi, Mae Hong Son

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Overview

Every year on June 20, the world commemorates World Refugee Day to honor and celebrate the resilience, strength, and hopes of all refugees worldwide. For this cause, World Refugee Day is also honored with an acknowledgment event within the Karenni refugee camps in Mae Hong Son Thailand. WEAVE, as part of many active NGOs within the camps, as well planned a celebratory afternoon event for this year's World Refugee Day. Therefore, all refugees who are part of WEAVE's work in the camps were invited to the WEAVE Quality Control Centre in Karenni Site 1, including the WSP teachers and students, the women artisans, the women of ECD, and all WEAVE personnel to recognize their achievements, provide a space for everyone to gather, share ideas, learn from each other, and celebrate belongingness and togetherness. The event was planned to facilitate room for around 100 participants with the objective of collective commemoration and various activities that celebrate the strength and resilience of the refugee women specifically.

Activities and Program

WEAVE staff arrived at the camp around 9 am on June 20 beginning their day by attending the World Refugee Day celebrations at the official venue where different groups performed multiple acts on a stage for the audience to enjoy. Various vendors sold food and drinks, and many NGOs had a booth to show their work in the camp. At 10:15 am WEAVE staff made their way to their venue for the planned afternoon activities.



Big square in Karenni Camp 1, official World Refugee Day commemoration



Big square in Karenni Camp 1, official World Refugee Day commemoration

Luckily, the venue (WEAVE Quality Control Centre) was already set up and ready for the event, only the banner for World Refugee Day had to be put up to mark the front of the stage. The staff coordinated the event's program and briefly went through each planned activity to rehearse and ensure the right timing.



WEAVE Quality Control Centre, prepared venue for WEAVE World Refugee Day commemoration



WEAVE World Refugee Day venue stage with WRD 2024 banner and WEAVE women artisan interns

Between 12 and 12:30 pm, most of the participants arrived at the venue. For documentation, all participants were asked to register and write their names on the attendance sheet. Many of the aunties (elder women of the community) arrived early and played music on traditional instruments for those who had already arrived.



Aunties (elder women of the Karenni community)



Intern Simone and Tharamu Say Meh speaking

After most of the expected participants arrived, the event was initiated by moderator Program Support Intern Eva's welcoming words and the outline of the event's program points. Tharamu Say Meh functioned as the translator for each speaker of this event. The initially planned welcoming by the Camp Committee Chair was canceled but the welcoming ceremony was engaging enough for the audience to follow along. After the first introduction and preliminaries, Program Support Intern Simone and Tharamu Say Meh introduced the objectives and each attending group of participants (WSP, ECD, women artisans). Program Support Intern Khin Oo followed this program point with her presentation on the current state of refugees worldwide, providing current data and context to the topic of World Refugee Day 2024. In her speech, she engaged with the audience and asked all participants to talk to their neighbors and share their experiences as refugees. This exercise led to discussions between all participants and one girl shared her story of flight publicly.



Intern Khin Oo and Tharamu Say Meh speaking



Girl speaking about her experience as a refugee

After discussing the current state of refugees worldwide and allowing for stories of the community to be shared with the audience, the next program point was a short film showing a video from Made51. The video narrated the story of a young girl and her journey into becoming a refugee but reconnecting with her “thread of hope.” The video was provided by Made51 UNHCR’s fair trade production of handicrafts from refugees worldwide. The video showing led to discussions in the plenary with the general response of many participants recognizing themselves in the story of the video. Thereby, the short film provided a representation of the situation of refugees and an outlook and hope for the audience to reconnect with their “thread of hope.”



Audience listening to the speaker

The film viewing was followed by volunteer Aster's presentation of a post-making contest introduced to the participants in the weeks before World Refugee Day to prepare their post entries for the competition. Five groups, consisting of WSP and ECD members each had a few weeks to paint one poster per group under the motto "Home." Each group had two minutes to present their posters to the plenary and describe their intentions and thoughts that went into the paintings. Afterward, the audience voted for the poster-making winner.



Girl of one group presenting their poster

Before the winner group of the poster-making competition would be announced at a later point, a short 15-minute break was planned in which the participants were provided with a snack and water to combat the afternoon heat and stay focused for the remainder of the afternoon event.

The next program point of the World Refugee Day 2024 event was the launch of WEAVE's Social Impact Fund to the audience, and thereby, to the women involved with WEAVE's work, either through the WSP, ECD, as women artisans, or interns of the program. WEAVE CEO Mitos Urgel and Tharamu Say Meh presented the fund to the plenary. The Social Impact Fund, as stated in a WEAVE-published information document, "provides a dedicated resource pool/sustainable financial opportunities specifically designed to address the unique and pressing needs of refugees. This fund allows us to channel resources towards projects and interventions that have a tangible and positive impact on refugees' lives, such as providing access to education, healthcare, livelihood opportunities, and psychosocial support." Thereby, that paper further states, the fund "serves as a mechanism to drive sustainable change and empowerment within refugee communities, helping them rebuild their lives, regain their dignity, and thrive despite the challenges they face. By focusing on social impact, we ensure that our efforts are meaningful, measurable, and contribute to the long-term well-being and resilience of refugees and the broader society." Eligible for the fund are projects such as social entrepreneurship, community development initiatives, environmental sustainability projects, education and healthcare programs, and projects aimed at alleviating poverty.



Audience listening to the presentation of the Social Impact Fund

Another launch followed this program point, where WEAVE CEO Mitos Urgel and Program Support Intern Simone introduced the Design Competition to the women artisans and interns in the audience. The Design Competition presented a contest for around five groups, each consisting of experienced women artisans (designers, sewers, weavers, embroiderers) and their interns, to invent a new design. The winning design will then be featured in the WEAVE shop and produced in greater numbers. This competition aims to provide an opportunity to be creative, recognize the capacity to invent new designs, and strengthen the teamwork within the groups bringing together expertise in different techniques to create a unique and outstanding product.

After launching the Social Impact Fund and the Design Competition, the audience was invited to ask any questions related to both launches and the preceding topics and activities, before the winner of the post-making contest was announced. Volunteer Aster moderated the awarding ceremony and went through each entry again, presenting an intriguing show and keeping it exciting until the winner, by majority choice, was announced.



Winner group with their poster

The WEAVE World Refugee Day 2024 event ended with applause to all participants and a collective shout-out of “Women Oppose War (WOW)” both in the English and Burmese language. This brought all attending women and girls closer together and allowed for solidarity against the suffering of (war) refugees worldwide. The commemoration was finished by taking pictures of each attending group and all participants together.



All groups of the poster-making contest with their posters



Group picture with all WEAVE World Refugee Day 2024 event participants

Evaluation

Altogether, the WEAVE World Refugee Day 2024 event was a great success. Even though not all invited persons showed up, many did respond to the invitation by showing up and participating in the event. The mix of the various groups involved with WEAVE (WSP, ECD, women artisans, interns) elevated the commemoration and brought a good atmosphere to the room and overall event. Thereby, the event helped with cross-generational exchange and solidarity.

Each program point was well thought through and benefited the event's cause. The combination of informative and interactive activities, as well as the presentation of both funds created a varied afternoon event. The mood for the event was held up through little icebreakers and energetic moderation, especially in the poster-making competition. Although the Q&A round was met with little to no questions, the information should have reached the audience, using the event to facilitate even more community engagement with much room for capacity-building and support for the development of ideas to better the lives of the Karenni refugees in the camps.