

The Refugees

Catholic Relief Services operations in Thailand are based "not on an optimistic, fluffy, pious kind of hope, but on a gutsy, realistic assessment," of the problems faced by Cambodian refugees, Jerome Vaiana said last week.

Vaiana and his wife Marsha, the Rochester couple who worked recently in the CRS-assisted Thailand camp at Sa Kaew, had just returned from a briefing at CRS headquarters in New York City. Since their return to the U.S. the Vaianas have become spokespersons for relief efforts in Thailand and Cambodia.

Vaiana stated that CRS officials think it most likely the population of the refugee camps in Thailand will swell considerably over the next few weeks.

Vaiana said that, because of military and political information from the region, CRS thinks that thousands of refugees now on the Cambodian side of the Thailand border, "will be pushed over,

and it could be very sudden." An alternative, he said, would be that the opposing armies of the Vietnam-based Cambodian government and the forces of ousted premiere Pol Pot would "attack and massacre the refugees within Cambodia."

That alternative, he said, is tentatively viewed as unlikely in light of the international concern focussed on the area.

CRS efforts in the refugee camps, Vaiana said, are based on providing both medicine and food assistance "to those who need it." Relief administration is trying to avoid what has become problematic in some camps; the hoarding of rice and medicines as means of exchange, Vaiana stated.

The Vaianas are working through the Diocesan Missions Office, the co-sponsor with the diocesan International Justice and Peace Commission, of a project to raise funds for CRS relief efforts.



A sea of faces: Cambodian refugees line up for food in a Thailand camp. Exclusive photographs on this page provided to the Courier-Journal by Catholic Relief Services through Jerome Vaiana.

How to Help

Cambodian Relief
123 East Ave.
Rochester, N.Y. 14604



A Cambodian madonna and child.



The ravages of war.



A refugee mother is served a ration of milk by a CRS official.



The teeming humanity in the camp at Sa Kaew.