

Making the Invisible Ones visible

(article for BOS programme guide – Oct 2008)

Saw Mwee's pained stare remained imprinted on my mind for days afterwards. He had lost the lower part of his right leg when he stepped on a landmine. He speaks quietly about what had happened, sitting in the crowded surgical ward of the Mae Tao Clinic, in the border town of Mae Sot, some 500 km northwest of Bangkok, Thailand. Five days earlier he was on a hillside in Burma, clearing a field for planting with his brother. The two had walked into the surrounding forest in search of fruit when Saw Mwee was thrown to the ground by an explosion. Saw Mwee was lucky to have survived, though he doesn't think of it that way. He explains how that day in the forest he had repeatedly pleaded with his brother to kill him.



Saw Mwee is one of the people we spoke to for 'Camera's voor De Onzichtbaren', a film that follows Karin Kuiper in her efforts to put a human face on the plight of the refugees of Burma. In March 2008, Karin journeyed to the Thai-Burma border to continue the work of her late husband, the writer Karel Glastra van Loon (o.a. de Passievrucht, Lisa's Adem).

Karel's last novel, 'De Onzichtbaren', vividly describes the intimidation, violence and deprivations suffered by the refugees of Burma. Shortly after finishing the book however, Karel was diagnosed with a brain tumour. On July 1, 2005 he died, leaving behind not only a wife and three small children, but also a dream to help the 'invisible ones' become visible.



The full scale of the suffering on the border comes together in one place at the Mae Tao Clinic. It was early March, and Saw Mwee was already the 17th landmine victim to be treated this year. The clinic was founded by the Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Dr

Cynthia Maung. She had fled Burma herself after the government's violent crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in 1988. Dr Cynthia began her work in a dilapidated building on the edge of town, today the clinic complex provides free health care to over 100,000 people a year.

Over the years Dr Cynthia has added a string of additional projects to the main work of the clinic, focusing on areas like AIDS and the special needs of children. One of the boldest initiatives is the Back Pack Health Worker Team, a courageous group of medics who carry medicines on foot into the remote conflict zones of Eastern Burma. They had begun using cameras, to document their work and the human rights abuses they were witnessing, with impressive results. But only 2 of the 72 teams were so equipped. They needed more and this is where Karin's camera project came in.



Karin's personal story gives her the insights and empathy to help us connect with the suffering of these forgotten people. Through her 'Camera's voor De Onzichtbaren' project, we get a powerful insight into the complex issues facing the people of Burma – a people caught up in one of the longest and most intractable conflicts of our time.

Mark Verkerk, director 'Camera's voor De Onzichtbaren'.

For screening dates and more go to: www.camerasvoordeonzichtbaren.nl
To support Karin's project please send donations to Giro 97165 van Stichting Vluchteling o.v.v. 'Camera's voor De Onzichtbaren'.

To order DVD (Dutch & English language versions) go to: www.emsfilms.com/Shop

CAMERAS FOR THE INVISIBLE ONES

Karin Kuiper, widow of the celebrated Dutch author Karel Glastra van Loon, travels to the Thai-Burma border to fulfill a wish Karel had before he died — to bring cameras to the forgotten refugees of Burma.

On July 1, 2005, Karel Glastra van Loon, one of the Netherlands' most acclaimed authors, died of a brain tumour. Just 42, he was survived by his wife Karin Kuiper and their three young children. In 2002, Karel and his young family had spent 3 months in the small frontier town of Mae Sot, on Thailand's western border with Burma, researching what turned out to be his last novel, 'The Invisible Ones'. And although Karel managed to finish his book before he died, his plans to provide refugees with digital cameras were left unrealised...

In March 2008, Karin returns to Mae Sot determined to realise Karel's plan. Along the way she retraces the steps he took researching 'The Invisible Ones'.

"With this project I want to give the Burmese people the tools to make themselves visible."

Karin Kuiper

EMS FILMS
Photography: Back Pack Health Worker Team
www.camerasvoordeonzichtbaren.nl

director: Mark Verkerk (Buddha's Lost Children) executive producer: Pim van Collen producer: Ton Okkenes Producer for: Buurdist, Broadcasting Foundation and the Netherlands Refugee Foundation

CAMERAS FOR THE INVISIBLE ONES

DVD

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