

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

News Flash

AI Index: ASA 26/010/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 165
9 July 2003

Laos: Three foreigners released but Lao nationals are tortured and remain in detention

Amnesty International welcomed today the release of two European journalists, Thierry Falise and Vincent Reynaud, and their US interpreter, Naw Karl Mua. They were arrested on 4 June whilst reporting the on-going internal armed conflict in Laos.

However, the organization is increasingly concerned about the fate of the Lao nationals who were assisting them and who remain in detention. They have reportedly already been badly tortured.

“Amnesty International has received reliable accounts that the ethnic Hmong Lao nationals were beaten with sticks and bicycle chains by police after their arrest. We are gravely concerned by the reports of the torture of Pa Fue Khang, Thao Moua and Char Yang and other unnamed fellow ethnic Hmong prisoners,” Amnesty International said.

“According to the witness reports, one of the ethnic Hmong prisoners was repeatedly knocked unconscious. All were reportedly shackled in leg irons. It is not known where they are presently being detained.”

Given the consistent reports of the most serious violations of fundamental human rights in prisons in Laos, Amnesty International appealed for the prisoners to be given immediate access to medical care, lawyers and their families. The organization called upon the Lao authorities to permit specialist international agencies and outside observers access to its detention facilities.

“Widespread allegations of torture in police stations and prisons need to be investigated by impartial and independent experts” the organization added.

Amnesty International also called on the authorities to adhere to international standards of fair trial and transparency if and when the case of the Lao nationals reaches appeal.

“Unlike the foreigners, the Lao nationals reportedly had no legal representation and their sentences, ranging from 12 to 20 years, were handed down after a trial lasting just over two hours. The precise charges against them remain unclear. This is not justice” said Amnesty International.

Following the release of the three foreigners, the international community must not ignore and wash their hands of the plight of the ethnic Hmong involved in the decades-old internal armed conflict that the journalists were reporting.

“The international community must ensure that humanitarian law is respected and Laos lives up to its international obligations,” Amnesty International added.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>