

PUBLIC

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UA 159/06 Fear of forcible return

THAILAND **At least 231 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees**

A group of 231 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees, including women and children, were reportedly arrested on 5 June in northern Thailand. They are in imminent danger of being forcibly returned to Laos, where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment.

They were arrested near a refugee camp in the village of Huay Nam Khao, in the province of Phetchabun. They are now detained at Khao Kho district jail with an unknown number of ethnic Hmong refugees, 17 of whom recently arrived from Laos and were arrested on 3 June. The refugees in Huay Nam Khao claim to be fleeing persecution in Laos.

In the past few months, there have been numerous reports of the Lao armed forces increasing their military action against ethnic Hmong groups.

One group of 27 ethnic Hmong refugees from Huay Nam Khao refugee camp were forcibly returned to Laos on 5 December 2005 and have been detained incommunicado since then, reportedly in deplorable conditions. They have reportedly been ill-treated; some of them may have been tortured. Most are children.

Approximately 6000 ethnic Hmong Laotians are living in the makeshift refugee camp in Huay Nam Khao. They started arriving there in large numbers in 2004, seeking refugee status. The majority of them claim they have been persecuted because of their connection with rebels in an ongoing conflict with the Lao military. The Thai authorities define them as "illegal" immigrants, while the Lao government has expressed doubt that they are Lao nationals.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Some ethnic Hmong rebel groups, who fought with the US during the Viet Nam war and its spill-over fighting in Laos, have continued sporadic resistance to the current Lao regime since it came to power in 1975. Up to a third of the Hmong minority in Laos, estimated to be 300,000 in 1970, are believed to have fled abroad around that time, the vast majority resettling as refugees in the US. An unknown number of Hmong and other minorities have remained in the jungle hiding from the Lao military, with extremely limited access to basic necessities such as food and medical care. Some have continued armed resistance to the Lao government, but most are not believed to be involved in fighting.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that a large group of ethnic Hmong refugees arrested in Phetchabun province on 5 June and currently detained at Khao Kho district jail may be at imminent risk of forcible return to Laos;
- urging the Thai authorities not to forcibly return the group, as they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, including torture;
- expressing concern that other ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees have been forcibly returned to Laos, where they have faced serious human rights violations;
- reminding the Thai authorities that under international law they are obliged not to return anyone to a country where he or she would be at risk of serious human rights violations.

APPEALS TO:

Thaksin Shinawatra
Prime Minister
Government House
Pitsanulok Road, Dusit District
Bangkok 10300
Thailand

Fax: + 66 2 282 8631
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Kongsak Wantana
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Atsadang Road
Bangkok 10200
Thailand

Fax: + 66 2 226 4371
Salutation: Dear Minister

Cherdchai Pavaro-pas
Provincial Police chief
Phetchabun Province
Thailand

Salutation: Dear Major-General

COPIES TO:

Sant Sarutanond
Commissioner General
Royal Thai Police
Rama I
Patumwan
Bangkok 10330, Thailand

Fax: + 66 2 251 5956
Salutation: Dear Commissioner General

diplomatic representatives of Thailand accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 19 July 2006.