

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 20/01  
conscience

Fear of forcible repatriation/possible prisoners of

23 March 2001

KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA24 Vietnamese ethnic minority men (names unknown)

Twenty-four people who fled to Cambodia to escape a crackdown on ethnic unrest are reportedly facing forcible return to Vietnam, where they face persecution. They are reported to be seeking asylum.

The 24 men were arrested in Mondulkiri province on 17 and 21 March 2001. The Mondulkiri provincial authorities are reportedly preparing to return them to Viet Nam, after requests from the Vietnamese authorities. However, police and military sources have said they believe the men are seeking asylum, and they are waiting for instructions from the Ministry of Interior. One military source has been quoted as saying that the men were involved in a non-violent protest in Vietnam.

They are reported to be members of ethnic minorities, who fled Viet Nam after a crackdown by the authorities, which followed serious ethnic unrest in the central highlands in February.

The Cambodian authorities have previously forcibly returned several dozen people to Viet Nam, where they have been ill-treated and sentenced to long prison terms.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The central highlands of Viet Nam are home to a number of ethnic minority groups. However, the migration of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Vietnamese people to the area has reportedly caused resentment. There were protests after two ethnic minority men were arrested on 30 January, which quickly escalated, leading to widespread unrest. Thousands of ethnic minority people took part in major demonstrations, believed to be in protest over land issues and religious freedom. During the unrest, the provinces of Dac Lac and Gia Lai were effectively cut off by the military, with no tourists or journalists allowed into the area. The authorities claimed that some people were injured and property damaged during the protests.

According to official reports 20 people were arrested in connection with the unrest. Unofficial sources, however, have claimed that hundreds of members of central highland ethnic minorities, collectively known as Degar people, have been arrested and beaten.

The Vietnamese authorities have alleged that the unrest was instigated by members of FULRO, an ethnic minority armed opposition group active during the Viet Nam war, which ended in 1975. The group is no longer believed to be active.

The ethnic Vietnamese minority and Vietnamese asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable groups in Cambodia. They face widespread discrimination, which is reflected in government policies, and in recent years they have been attacked, forcibly exiled and denied equal protection under the law.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that 24 people may be forcibly returned to Viet Nam, where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations;
- stressing Cambodia's obligation not to forcibly return people to countries where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, as outlined in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Cambodia is a party;
- urging the authorities to ensure that the 24 are allowed to seek asylum, and access to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and that no asylum-seekers and refugees are forcibly returned from Cambodia.

**APPEALS TO:**

Sar Kheng  
Co-Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior and National Security  
275 Blvd Norodom  
Phnom Penh  
Cambodia  
**Fax: + 855 23 212708 (if voice, ask for fax)**  
**Salutation:Dear Minister**

You Hockry  
Co-Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior and National Security  
275 Blvd Norodom  
Phnom Penh  
Cambodia  
**Fax: + 855 23 212708 (if voice, ask for fax)**  
**Salutation:Dear Minister**

Khoy Kimhuor  
Deputy Governor of Mondulkiri  
Office of the Governor  
Senmonorom  
Mondulkiri  
Cambodia  
**Telegrams:Deputy Governor, Mondulkiri**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Kingdom of Cambodia accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 April 2001.