

PUBLIC

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23 June 2006

Further Information on UA 159/06 (ASA 39/007/2006, 07 June 2006) – Fear of forcible return New Concern: Health Concern

THAILAND At least 231 Hmong Laotian refugees

The group of at least 231 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees, including women and children have reportedly been moved to police detention facilities across the province of Phetchabun and possibly also neighbouring provinces. This is due to overcrowding and a lack of food at Khao Kho district jail, which remains overcrowded. Amnesty International is concerned for their health.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and health authorities have been allowed to provide medical assistance to some of the refugees, but there appears to be no systematic and reliable provisions of food to all of them.

The refugees are still at risk of forcible return to Laos where they would be in danger of serious human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment. Approximately two weeks ago, the Provincial Governor of Phetchabun, Torphong Ampan reportedly said that the refugees would be sent back to Laos via the Loei Province border checkpoint. His deputy reiterated this statement, citing a National Security Council policy to deport illegal immigrants.

Approximately 6000 ethnic Hmong Laotians live 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 alleged connection with Hmong rebel groups 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.

The situation at the camp is gradually worsening and an increasing number of refugees are falling ill due to a lack of food. Warnings about the health of the camp population have been raised since March, when the police set up a checkpoint to restrict movements for the refugees and denied them the opportunity to search for food or firewood outside the camp.

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

- expressing concern at least 231 Hmong Laotian refugees are reportedly facing a food shortage and that an increasing number is falling ill as a result;
- reminding the authorities of their obligation under the Article 11.1 of the International Convention on Economic, Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to ensure "...the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions" and their obligation under Article 10(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to ensure that "All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person."
- urging the Thai authorities not to forcibly return the group to Laos, as they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment;
- 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

Torphong Ampan
Governor
Phetchabun Province
Thailand

Fax: + 66 5 671 3173

Salutation: Dear Governor

Cherdchai Pavaro-pas
Provincial Police chief
Phetchabun Province
Thailand

Salutation: Dear Major-General

COPIES TO:

Kovit Wattana
Commissioner General
Royal Thai Police
Rama I
Patumwan
Bangkok 10330, Thailand

Fax: +66 2 251 5956

Salutation: Dear Commissioner General

and to 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 4 August 2006.