

Laos/Thailand: Nhia Vue, 12, Mai Ker Vue, 14, and Xiong Vue, 16

Concern: Arbitrary detention, ill-treatment/torture

'We had to flee as the Lao soldiers were killing and poisoning us', Chao Vue speaking to Amnesty International.

Three sisters, Nhia Vue, 12, Mai Ker Vue, 14, and Xiong Vue, 16, have been missing since 5 December 2005. They were among 27 ethnic Hmong people, 22 of them children, who were forcibly returned to Laos by the Thai authorities, after being arrested for entering Thailand illegally. Until their arrest they had been living with their family in an informal refugee camp in the village of Huay Nam Khao, where approximately 7,000 ethnic Hmong from Laos are seeking sanctuary from alleged persecution by the Lao authorities.

Lee Vang and her husband Chao Vue last saw their three daughters when church leaders collected them for choir practice ahead of Hmong New Year and Christmas celebrations. The family of nine had come to the camp after escaping from the Lao jungle, where they had been hiding from Lao government troops.

Parents still in the Thai refugee camp have had no contact with their deported children since the day they were arrested, nor with authorities on either side of the Thai/Laos border. Little is known about what happened to the 27 people since they were deported. The Lao authorities have not confirmed their whereabouts and deny any responsibility and they claim to be looking for them out of humanitarian concern.

Reports indicate that the girls have been in a prison outside the town of Paksen in Bolikhamsay province, and that the boys and young men were first held in Vientiane, then allegedly transferred to Phongsaly in the far north. Conditions are said to be hard. Some of the deportees are believed to have been ill-treated; some may have been tortured.

Lee Vang says that the family have no relatives in mainstream society in Laos, only in the jungle. So nobody can even attempt to visit the prison to discover if the children are there, or to supply them with food and other basic provisions.

Please write to the authorities:

- Calling on them to establish the whereabouts of Nhia Vue, Mai Ker Vue and Xiong Vue and the other 24 who were forcibly returned to Laos from Thailand on 5 December 2005.
- Calling on them to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Nhia Vue, Mai Ker Vue and Xiong Vue and the other children and permit them to return to Thailand to be reunited with their family.
- Asking the authorities to take concrete action to uphold their obligations as a state party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Please send appeals to:

Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh
Office of the Prime Minister
Rue Sisavat
Vientiane
Lao Peoples Democratic Republic