

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 26/012/2003

02 September 2003

**Further Information on UA 168/03 (ASA 26/005/2003, 11 June 2003) Fear of extrajudicial execution/
Fear for safety New concern: Medical concern**

**LAO PEOPLE'S
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**

**Yeng Houa Yong (m), aged 9 (note corrected name)
Ka Ying Yang (m), aged 18
Bang Yang (f), aged 15
Mai Xiong Lee, aged three months - Bang Yang's baby
Several hundred men, women and children - names unknown**

Concerns have increased for the safety of several groups of rebels from the Hmong ethnic community and their families. The groups, who are surrounded by Lao and possibly also Vietnamese army units, reportedly have little food and no access to medical care. Many are said to be suffering from serious health and nutrition problems, as well as exhaustion.

According to local sources, in one group in Xaisomboune Special Zone, northeast of Vientiane, 30 people died from starvation during the first week of August, including 25 children, of whom 19 were girls and six were boys. Thirty-two people from another group in the Vang Vieng area of Vientiane province reportedly died from starvation between May and July. They included 10 girls and six boys, all of whom were aged between three and 12. There is no further news on the fate of Yeng Houa Yong, Ka Ying Yang, Bang Yang and her three-month-old baby, Mai Xiong Lee, all from a Hmong group in the Phoukout district of Xieng Khouang province, northeast of Vientiane.

The situation for the groups has reportedly deteriorated severely since July, when the Lao military stepped up attacks on Hmong rebel camps in areas north and northeast of the capital Vientiane, resulting in an unknown number of deaths.

In an article in the state-controlled Vientiane Times newspaper of 26-28 August, the Vice President of the Lao Front for National Construction, who is responsible for ethnic minority matters in Laos, stated: "The government has a policy to give a pardon if these people come out from the forest and settle as permanent residents with villagers..." However, the ethnic Hmong groups, which include women, children, and elderly people, are reportedly too afraid of the Lao authorities to lay down their arms, fearing extrajudicial execution or other forms of retribution.

On 22 August the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination initiated an urgent action procedure and issued recommendations to the Lao authorities to address the extremely serious violations of human rights in Laos, particularly relating to the current situation of some of the ethnic Hmong rebel groups in Laos. As many as 3,000 Hmong may be currently at risk of extrajudicial execution.

Some Hmong rebel groups have themselves been linked to recent attacks on long-distance bus routes in rural areas and other crowded targets, which have resulted in considerable numbers of deaths and injuries to civilians. Amnesty International appeals to all Hmong rebel groups to immediately cease indiscriminate targeting of civilians and to abide by all provisions of Additional Protocol II to the four Geneva Conventions that apply to both government and opposition forces alike.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Hmong ethnic minority group in Laos were allied to the US during the Viet Nam war and its spill-over fighting in both Laos and Cambodia. They have a long history of resistance and aspirations of independence

from Lao government control. Following the creation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975 and the fall of the former regime, as many as a third of the Hmong ethnic minority are believed to have fled the country. Most of these refugees resettled in the USA, but a large number spent many years in refugee camps in Thailand. Sporadic Hmong resistance continues, and there are also continuing allegations of serious human rights abuses against those Hmong perceived as still being opposed to the Lao government.

Laos ratified Additional Protocol II to the four Geneva Conventions in 1980. This Protocol explicitly provides for the protection of those not involved in fighting and those who choose to lay down their arms and forbids attacks on civilian populations as well as individual civilians. Those who cease to take part in hostilities "shall in all circumstances be treated humanely". Article 5 of the Protocol sets out strict rules protecting those detained in relation to armed conflict. Children, especially, must be provided with the care and assistance they require.

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

- acknowledging that ethnic Hmong rebel groups have been linked to the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, including during attacks on buses and crowded places, abuses which Amnesty International unequivocally condemns;
- expressing concern for the plight of several hundred ethnic Hmong rebels and their families, including women, children and elderly living under extremely harsh conditions in areas north and northeast of the capital, Vientiane;
- expressing concern at reports that a number of people from the Hmong ethnic group, the majority of whom were children, have died of starvation in recent months;
- welcoming the official statement that Laos has a government policy to offer pardon to those who lay down their arms, but urging the authorities to guarantee that ethnic Hmong rebels who cease hostilities will not face extrajudicial execution or other forms of retribution;
- calling for the Lao authorities to give access to specialist UN agencies and others to provide urgently needed humanitarian assistance;
- calling on the Lao authorities to comply fully with recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to bring an end to grave human rights violations against ethnic minority groups in Laos;
- calling on the Lao authorities to comply fully with their international obligations, in particular to those laid out in Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions.

APPEALS TO:

Bouyang Vorachit, Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister, Rue Sisavat
Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic

Telegram: Prime Minister Bouyang Vorachit, Vientiane, Laos

Fax: + 856 21 212408 (c/o Ministry of Information)

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Tong Yeuthor, Vice President, Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC)
Office of the LFNC, Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic

Telegram: Tong Yeuthor, Lao Front for National Construction

Fax: + 856 21 414009 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Somsavat Lengsavat, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, That Luang
Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic

Telegram: Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vientiane, Laos

Fax: + 856 21 414009

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Lao People's Democratic Republic accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 October 2003.