

UA 187/00

Fear of R**THAILANDSok Yoeun**

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Amnesty International fears that the Thai authorities intend to send a recognised refugee, Sok Yoeun, back to Cambodia, where he faces politically motivated criminal charges. He is currently detained in a Bangkok prison, solely on the basis of the allegations made against him by the Cambodian authorities. Amnesty International believes these allegations to be without foundation, and that Sok Yoeun is a prisoner of conscience.

Sok Yoeun, who comes from Battambang province, Cambodia, is a member of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), led by the prominent politician Sam Rainsy. The Cambodian authorities have accused Sok Yoeun of responsibility for a rocket attack in Siem Reap province in September 1998. The alleged target of the rocket attack was Prime Minister Hun Sen's motorcade, although the actual target remains unclear. Two other SRP activists were arrested in Cambodia in connection with the attack, and detained *incommunicado* in the Military Detention Facility in Phnom Penh for six months. They were released in March 2000, after the investigating judge failed to find any evidence against them. The Cambodian judicial system is weak and subject to political pressure. The Military Court is not independent, and comes under the authority of the Ministry of Defence.

Sok Yoeun was arrested in Thailand on 24 December 1999, after a Thai politician complained that Thailand was harbouring a Cambodian terrorist. The alleged evidence was a videotaped forced confession, which Sok Yoeun had made in October 1999 while forcibly detained and threatened in a Bangkok hotel room by a Thai national. Sok Yoeun was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for illegal immigration. This sentence expired on Monday 26 June, after which time he has been remanded in custody. He is currently detained pending extradition court hearings, although there is no ratified extradition treaty between Thailand and Cambodia. Various Thai government sources have been quoted in Thai newspapers, stating that the case is "not political" and that Sok Yoeun can be sent back to Cambodia. Sok Yoeun is over 50 years old, and his health has suffered during his six months in detention. Conditions in Thai prisons are harsh.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Thailand is host to tens of thousands of refugees, the majority of them from neighbouring Myanmar. The country is not a state party to the UN 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 protocol, and individuals seeking asylum have no legal rights in Thailand. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees operates in Thailand, carrying out refugee status determination and providing support to refugees, with the permission of the Royal Thai government. In the last six months, the Thai authorities have implemented a crackdown on illegal immigrants, including widespread arrests and deportations. Refugees and asylum-seekers, whom the Thai authorities label "illegal immigrants" have been detained in poor conditions, and in some cases, forcibly returned to countries where they face persecution. In February 2000, the Thai authorities forcibly deported to Myanmar a Burmese asylum seeker Saw Tin Oo, who has since been sentenced to death in Myanmar for high treason.

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

-expressing your concern at the continued detention in a Bangkok prison of Cambodian national Sok Yoeun, who has been recognised as a refugee by the UNHCR, and asking for his immediate and unconditional release from prison;  
- asking for assurances that Sok Yoeun will not be sent back to Cambodia, where he faces unfair trial and years of imprisonment on charges for which there is no evidence against him;  
- urging the authorities to allow Sok Yoeun to leave Thailand for resettlement in a third country, where he will be free from persecution.

**APPEALS TO:**

Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Government House  
Pitsanuloke Road, Dusit  
Bangkok 10300  
Thailand

**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Faxes:+ 66 2 280 1443**

**Salutation:Dear Prime Minister**

Surin Pitsuwan  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Sri Ayudhya Road  
Bangkok 10400  
Thailand

**Telegrams: Foreign Minister, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Faxes:+66 2 643 5180**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

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 10 August 2000.