

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 23/011/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 219
28 November 2002

Cambodia/Thailand: Sok Yoeun must not be extradited

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by today's decision by a Thai court to extradite Sok Yoeun, a Cambodian national back to Cambodia.

"This decision is inexplicable. The Thai courts faced a big test with this case and were found wanting," Amnesty International said today.

The presiding judge disregarded the fact that Sok Yoeun has been already recognised as a refugee by the UNHCR in Thailand. He reportedly said that since Thailand is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention, this fact is immaterial to the case.

"We would like to remind the Thai judiciary that the principle of *non-refoulement*, is binding on all states as international customary law. No state may return an individual to a country where he will face serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International believes that Sok Yoeun's case is politically motivated, and should therefore not fall within the bounds of the extradition agreement between Thailand and Cambodia which does not allow for the extradition of persons accused of political offences.

"The court's decision is in effect a sentence to a prolonged period of detention, and unfair trial, and the possibility of *incommunicado* detention and ill-treatment for an elderly man, recognised as a refugee by the UNHCR and regarded as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International," the international human rights organization added.

"We hope the Thai appeal court will overturn this verdict and we urge the Thai Government to permit Sok Yoeun, now in ill health, to join his wife and children who have already been resettled by the United Nations as refugees in a third country," Amnesty International said.

Background

Sok Yoeun was arrested on 24 December 1999 after a Thai politician complained that Thailand was harbouring a Cambodian "terrorist". Two months earlier, he had been forced into making a videotaped confession, after he was detained and threatened by a Thai national. He was initially sentenced to six months' imprisonment for entering the country illegally. Since this sentence expired on 26 June 2000, he has remained in detention pending the outcome of a request for his extradition to Cambodia. This request was made

under legislation that does not allow for the extradition of persons accused of political offences.

Public Document

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