

THAILANDSok Yoeun [m], aged over 50

Recognised refugee and prisoner of conscience Sok Yoeun is being denied medical attention, although his health has deteriorated drastically in the last few weeks. There are also fears that he may be forcibly returned to Cambodia, where he is wanted for political reasons.

Sok Yoeun, who is over 50 years old, is currently detained in a Bangkok prison. Conditions in Thai prisons are harsh, and Sok Yoeun's health has reportedly been deteriorating in recent weeks. He has been fainting, vomiting and suffering from dizzy spells. His lawyers have asked the prison for a medical report on his condition, and have requested that he be allowed access to independent medical care. There has been no positive response to either request.

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 been detained 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 offenses. Various Thai government sources have reportedly said that the case is "not political", and that he can be sent back to Cambodia.

The Cambodian authorities have accused Sok Yoeun, who is a member of a prominent Cambodian opposition party, the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), of being responsible for a 1998 rocket attack, which the Prime Minister, Hun Sen, claimed was aimed at him. Two other SRP activists were arrested in Cambodia in connection with the attack, and were held incommunicado in the Military Detention Facility in the capital, Phnom Penh, for six months. They were released in March 2000, after the investigating judge failed to find any evidence against them. They have since fled Cambodia and been resettled in another country.

If returned to Cambodia, Sok Yoeun will face criminal charges arising from the allegations, which are widely believed to be unfounded. It is likely that he will face an unfair trial, and he could be imprisoned for years.

Sok Yoeun has been recognised as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Thailand, and has reportedly been offered resettlement in a third country.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Thailand is host to tens of thousands of refugees. Individuals seeking asylum in Thailand have no legal rights, as the country is not a state party to the United Nations (UN) 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, or its 1967 protocol. With the permission of the Royal Thai government, the UNHCR nevertheless operates in Thailand, where it carries out refugee status determination and provides support to refugees. In the last year, the Thai authorities have sought to crack down on illegal immigrants, and have carried out widespread arrests and deportations. Refugees and asylum seekers, whom the Thai authorities label "illegal immigrants", have been detained in poor

conditions. In some cases they have been forcibly returned to countries where they face persecution. In February 2000, the Thai authorities forcibly deported a Burmese asylum seeker, Saw Tin Oo, to Myanmar, where he has since been sentenced to death for high treason.

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

- expressing concern for the health of Sok Youen, urging the prison authorities to allow him access to a doctor of his choice, and to provide his lawyers with a medical report on his condition;
- expressing concern at his continued detention, despite the fact that he has been recognised as a refugee by the UNHCR;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release from prison;
- asking for assurances that he will not be returned to Cambodia, where he faces unfair trial and years of imprisonment on charges for which there is no evidence;
- urging the authorities to allow him to leave Thailand for resettlement in a third country, where he will be free from persecution.

APPEALS TO (Please note that it can be difficult getting through to Thai fax numbers, especially as they are often switched off outside office hours. Please be patient and keep trying):

Thaksin Shinawatra
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Government House
Pitsanulok Road, Dusit
Bangkok 10300
Thailand

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand
Faxes: + 66 2 280 1443
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Surakiart Sathirathai
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sri Ayudhya Road
Bangkok 10400
Thailand

Telegrams: Foreign Minister, Bangkok, Thailand
Faxes: + 66 2 643 5180
Salutation: Dear Minister

Siva Sangmanee
Director of Correction Department
Nonthaburee Road 1
Nonthaburee
Bangkok 11000
Thailand

Faxes: + 66 2 967 3335
Salutation: Dear Director

Sombat Deoisares
Chief Justice of the Criminal Court
The Criminal Court

Ratchadapisak Road
Jutujak
Bangkok 10900
Thailand

Faxes: + 66 2 541 2273

Salutation: Dear Chief Justice

COPIES 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 23 May 2001.